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OR,
MESSENDER MAX, DETECTIVE.
A STORY OF BROOKLYN.
BY MARMADUKE DEY.

CHAPTER I.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

FULTON STREET, near the City Hall, in the City of Brooklyn, between eleven and twelve o'clock on a dark, drizzly night.

"Hi there! Boy! I say. Boy!"

"Yes, sir," respectfully replied the youth, who had nimbly run across the street in answer to the call. He stood peering up at the man from under the visor of his messenger cap, and added: "What can I do for you?"

"WELL, I'M BLESSED IF HE AIN'T THE MOST CAREFUL CROOK I EVER HEARD OF!" MUSED MAX. "A BIG FELLOW WOULD HAVE HAD NO SHOW FOLLOWING HIM TO NIGHT!"

"I want you to run a short errand for me," said the man, who was very tall and broad-shouldered.

"I am just returning from one, and must report at the office first," replied the boy.

"I will give you a dollar if you will go now," urged the man.

"Can't do it," replied the boy laconically.

"But it is a question of life and death. A friend of mine has been very badly hurt and I want you to go for his uncle, down here a very short way."

"How long will it take me to do it?" asked the lad.

"Oh, less than half an hour."

"Then I'll earn the dollar. What is it I am to do?"

"You are to go to No — Remsen street, and ask for Mr. Mordaunt, and when you see that gentleman, you are to tell him that his nephew Paul has met with a serious accident, and that you are sent to bring him to the injured man."

"Where is that, sir?"

"Here—at the head of these stairs. Mr. Mordaunt will undoubtedly accompany you, and you are to bring him right here, go up these stairs and knock gently at the first door you come to on the right. Now go. Here are fifty cents. When you return I will give you the other fifty," and the man, who was almost a giant in build, turned and disappeared up the stairs, while the boy started to do his errand on a brisk dog-trot.

His name was Maxwell Merry, and he had been for a long time in the employ of the District Telegraph Company as a messenger-boy.

He was just past his sixteenth birthday, and was a perfect specimen of a well-developed, sturdy, thorough-going American boy. His hair was dark and curly, his eyes brown, bright and truthful.

His companions, who, like himself, toiled through the streets at all hours, respected him, and looked upon him as a sort of natural leader, for his language and manners were those of a boy whose home influences were of the best; who was a young gentleman because it was pleasanter to be that than anything else.

To them he was known as Max.

"I don't know as I am doing quite right," Max muttered to himself, as he trotted along. "I ought to have gone back to the office and reported, maybe, but then"—easing his conscience—"a half-hour won't make any difference there, and it isn't often I get a chance to make a dollar so easy.

"The house must be along here," he continued, looking closely at the doors for a number.

In a moment more he saw one plainly, for a light was burning behind it.

"This is the house!" exclaimed Max, halting. "A light in the second story, too. I'm in luck; won't have to ring half the night, to wake somebody."

He ran up the steps and pulled the bell.

There was an interval of a few moments, and then the door opened as far as the safety-chain on the inside would allow it, and an old gentleman peered out of the aperture thus created.

"Who is it?" he asked, in the quick, sharp tone of one who is very busy and dislikes being interrupted.

"Messenger-boy," was the prompt reply. "I was sent by a man on Fulton street and told to inquire for Mr. Mordaunt."

"Well, that's my name."

"I was told to tell you, Mr. Mordaunt, that your nephew Paul has met with a serious accident, and I am to guide you to him."

Mr. Mordaunt took the chain from the door and opened it.

"Come inside, out of the wet," he said, "and tell me all about it."

"I have told you all I know," replied Max. "I was returning from an errand when a man called me across the street and offered me a dollar to bring this message here. I ought to have gone to the office first," he added, apologetically, "but in a case of this kind I thought I might as well earn the dollar. Are you going back with me?"

"I don't know—confound it! I ought to and yet I ought not," replied the old gentleman. "There isn't a soul in the house but me. My servants have both gone out to spend the night; I ought not to leave the house alone; and yet, if Paul is badly hurt— Well, I'll risk it. Wait here a moment, young man, and I'll be with you," and he walked briskly up the stairs, while Max seated himself on a convenient chair and waited.

In a very few moments the old gentleman came down-stairs again, arrayed in rubber coat

and boots, and he and Max were soon hurrying along the street toward the place where the nephew was supposed to be lying.

"What is your name, young man?" asked Mr. Mordaunt, as they hastened along.

"Maxwell Merry, sir."

"District messenger-boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Been there long?"

"Nearly three years, sir."

"How old are you?" glancing at Max curiously.

"Sixteen, sir."

"Um! rather large for your age."

"Yes, sir: always was—at least, for the last three or four years."

"Where do you live?"

"In Bergen street, sir."

"With your parents?"

"With my mother, sir—my father I do not remember—he has been dead a good many years."

"Um! What do you do with your money?"

"I always give it to my mother, sir."

"Good! Keep on doing that, and you will succeed in life," said the old gentleman, sharply.

"I was an errand-boy myself once. Not your kind; they didn't have them in those days—but an errand-boy who stood around waiting for a chance to run an errand, hold a horse, carry a satchel, or any little job of the kind. I am a rich man now, Maxwell. Save your money, and you will be rich some day, too. How much did you say that fellow paid you for coming after me?"

"He gave me fifty cents, and is to give me fifty more when I return with you," replied Max.

"Um! Well, here is another dollar to go with it," and Mr. Mordaunt extended a bright silver dollar toward Max.

"Thank you, sir, very much," said Max, quickly, "but I have done nothing to earn that. The other dollar is more than pay enough for this trip."

"Never mind; take it and save it. Use it as a nest egg for those dollars you are going to save to become rich like me. I respect your scruples, boy, but take it, I say," and he spoke rather sharply.

Max thanked him, and took the dollar, thinking to himself that if things kept on in this way much longer, he would go home with a small fortune in his pocket.

"That's right!" said Mr. Mordaunt briskly. "Remember, that is your nest-egg. See that the nest is visited every day, and something put beside it, and once a month, clean out the nest and deposit what you find in the Savings Bank—but always leave your nest-egg there—always leave that. There will be pennies and nickels and dimes and quarters—seldom anything bigger than quarters at first, but they'll grow—they'll grow, and you will be surprised when the end of the month comes to see how much you have got; and next month you will have a little more—and more—and more—and so on! It is downright fun, Maxwell. I almost wish I was back again where you are, saving my pennies and nickels and counting them at the end of the month."

"I like your face and your manner, Maxwell, and if you should happen to lose your place, come and see me. Maybe, if you were not discharged for bad conduct, I might do something for you."

"Thank you, sir," said Max, looking up gratefully. "I thank you both for the offer to aid me, and for your good advice, which, I assure you, I will try to follow."

"That is right, my boy!" exclaimed the old gentleman heartily. "I thought I saw manliness in your face. You will succeed—"

"Excuse me, sir," interrupted Max, "but here we are. This is where the man told me to bring you. We are to go up these stairs and rap at the first door on the right, he said."

"All right—go ahead," was the reply, and Max led the way up the stairs.

There was no light in the hallway, and Max brought out his match-box and struck a match. By the faint glimmer thus produced, he quickly discovered the "first door on the right," at which he gently tapped.

It was opened instantly.

There was a dim light in the room, and a low moaning could be heard, coming apparently from a spot that could not be seen from the hallway.

The man who had engaged Max to do the errand was the one who opened the door.

"Step inside," he said, in a low tone. "Mr. Mordaunt, I presume. Your nephew has been anxiously expecting you."

"Yes," replied the old gentleman, to the first part of the other's speech, and he stepped past him into the room closely followed by Max.

The door was instantly closed and the key turned.

The tall man had seized Mr. Mordaunt in a terrible grip, and another man was rapidly winding a long rope around his body, binding his arms to his sides and his legs tightly together.

"Help!" shouted Max.

But before the word was fairly enunciated the big man swung his arm around, and the boy fell to the floor, half-senseless.

"I'll choke the life out of the first one of you that utters another sound," said the giant, coolly, but in a tone that both prisoners instinctively felt meant what it said.

In the meantime Max had recovered from the stunning effect of the blow.

With a quick spring he was on his feet and at the door. He turned the key, and in an instant more he would have been outside; but he was seized in a grip of iron.

"No, you don't!" said his captor. "I'm not quite through with you yet, my spry one."

CHAPTER II.

THE VILLAIN'S ESCAPE.

"WHAT are you going to do with me?" asked Mr. Mordaunt, calmly looking up from the floor where he lay tightly bound.

"Leave you here," replied the big man, gruffly, "until some one chooses to release you, or until you peg out for want of it. I'll risk your getting loose. In which pocket are the keys to your house and the cabinet in your room?"

"You seem to be very well posted," remarked Mr. Mordaunt, dryly.

"Never mind that!" harshly. "Tell me where the keys are; it will save you some discomfort."

He told the man, and in a moment more was relieved of them.

Meanwhile Max had been sitting on a chair in one corner of the room calmly waiting, knowing that escape was hopeless, for the present, at least.

Now he spoke.

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked. "I will lose my place if I am away from the office much longer."

The man who had hitherto kept silent now spoke to his associate. His voice was peculiar, and Max knew that if he ever heard it again he would recognize it.

"What shall we do with the youngster?" was what he said. "There is no more rope, and besides, it would not be good policy to leave the two here together."

The big man, who was busy forcing a gag into Mr. Mordaunt's mouth, turned his head, looked intently at Max a moment, and replied:

"We'll have to take him along; he can be dropped easily when the time comes."

By this time he had finished putting the gag in the old gentleman's mouth, and he walked over to where Max was sitting.

"What is your name, young 'un?" he asked.

"That's my business," replied Max. "Maybe you'll know some day, to your sorrow."

"It makes no difference, anyway," muttered the villain. "How old are you?"

"That is my business, too," retorted Max, coolly. "I am not going to answer any questions, mister—not if you choke me."

"Ah!" with a sneer. "You're plucky, I see; got what the boys call 'sand.' Well, I'll tell you something that you can think over. Pay attention, now: We are going to take you in the street with us. We may meet some one—a cop, even. If you utter one sound without my permission, or attempt to attract attention in any way, I'll stick this through your heart, if it's the last act of my life. I mean just what I say," and he exhibited a gleaming knife to the dauntless boy, who paled ever so little under the threat.

The two men then lifted Mr. Mordaunt from the floor and placed him upon a cot-bed that stood in one corner of the room, the big fellow remarking rather sardonically as they did so, that he had no wish to make him unnecessarily uncomfortable.

"Now, youngster, we'll travel," said the big man, taking Max by the arm and opening the door.

"Good-by, Mordaunt, he continued, ironically, pausing as he was about closing the door. "I don't think you'll ever see me again. I'm sorry to be so hard on you, but it can't be helped this time, and the boy can come and let you loose when we part company with him. You'll be considerably poorer for this night's

work, but I guess you'll have enough to keep you from starving, for all that. Good-night!" and he chuckled audibly as he closed the door, locked it and dropped the key purposely on the floor.

Down the stairs the three went, the big man never once loosing his vise-like grip on Max's arm. Down the stairs and along the street, with never a person in sight to whom Max could shout for help, for he had resolved to risk the knife and call for assistance should the opportunity offer.

But it did not.

They traversed the whole distance between the starting-point and the residence of Mr. Mordaunt without seeing a sign of a human being.

Arrived at the house, Max's captor, after a hurried glance up and down the street, ran with him up the steps, inserted the key in the door, and, followed by his partner in crime, and still dragging Max with him, entered the house.

He closed the door quickly behind him, and, without a moment's hesitation—seeming, indeed, to be perfectly familiar with the interior of the house, he went up the stairs and into the old gentleman's room.

"You sit there," he said, grimly, to Max, indicating a couch in the corner of the room furthest from the door, "and don't you dare to move unless I tell you to."

"Now, Tom," to his companion, "there is the cabinet," pointing to an article of furniture near him, "and inside it is the cash. Hello! what's this?" going hastily to the table. "By Jove!" he continued, after a moment, "I guess the old fellow was counting the stuff when we sent for him. Here is a lot of loose change and a pile of bonds and securities lying on the table. I might as well slip a handful of that loose silver in my pocket," thoughtfully; "it's handy for car-fare."

"Come!" said the one he had called Tom, who seemed a trifle nervous. "Less prattle and to business. I want to get out of this as soon as possible."

"He's no regular 'crook,'" thought Max, eying the man Tom sharply, "and they have both got false beards on. I can see that, although they are very cleverly made. That big one is a dare-devil—afraid of nothing. He looks and speaks as though he is a bad egg, and I'll bet he has seen the inside of a prison; but all the same he's no burglar or ordinary thief. Anyhow, if I ever see either one of them again, I'll know him."

While Max had been thus musing to himself, the men had not been idle.

The cabinet had been opened and a large tin box taken out.

The box was not locked, and the raising of the lid disclosed the fact that it was nearly filled with gold and bank-notes.

The giant rubbed his hands.

"How much did you say there should be?" he asked of his companion.

"Forty-five thousand dollars," was the reply, "but there is going to be no counting done here."

"Mr. Tom is the fellow that's posted," thought Max.

"No," assented the big one. "I guess it's time we got out. Where is the satchel?"

"Here."

Together they stuffed the notes and gold into the open bag, until not a thing was left in the tin box.

The big man took a twenty-dollar gold-piece in his hand and tossed it to Max.

"There!" he said with a laugh. "That will pay you for your lost time."

The piece fell on the couch by Max's side.

He seized the gold and sprung to his feet, an angry flush burning on his face.

"Take it back, you thief!" he cried, in a clear ringing voice, burling it with all his force, straight at the giant's head.

The giant dodged, but not quite quickly enough, for the gold-piece struck his ear, clipping off a piece of the lobe about the size of a white bean.

"You young fiend!" cried the man, springing upon Max and seizing him roughly, "I'll break your neck for that."

He probably would have carried out his threat, had not the man Tom grasped him by the arm.

"Come," he said. "No foolishness now! Keep your beastly temper for once, when so much depends on it. We must leave this house immediately, or some one will get on to our little game, and then the jig's up. Come!"

The giant hesitated an instant.

"You're right, Tom," muttered, and giving Max a cruel cuff on the ear that made him dizzy, he picked up the satchel, and, followed by Tom, who had taken the brave messenger-boy by the arm, they descended the stairs to the front hall.

"We ought to leave this young 'un here," said the big man, pausing.

"There is no time," replied the fellow Tom.

"What shall we do with him?"

"Oh, we can drop him somewhere as we go along."

"Well, you take the bag, and let me have hold of him; he would get away from you," and the giant once more took hold of Max.

"Now, my boy," he said, meaningly, "if you know what's best for you, you'll keep as silent as the grave."

The door was opened, and in a moment more, they were in the street.

Max looked eagerly about him.

Now was the time to call for help, if ever, while they had the booty in their possession.

"If I could only see a policeman," he thought. But none were in sight.

They were approaching the City Hall.

Suddenly around the corner appeared a form.

Max's heart gave a quick bound.

It was a policeman.

At the same time the giant's grip on the boy's arm tightened until it stopped the circulation, and he bent over and ground out between his teeth:

"Mind—if you make a sound, I will kill you!"

The policeman came nearer.

Max had resolved to make a desperate effort to free himself from the iron grip on his arm, as soon as they were near the officer, and to cry for help.

Patiently he awaited his opportunity.

The big man glanced hastily around. There was no one but the policeman in sight.

They drew nearer together—they were side by side.

"Help! help!" cried Max, lustily, trying to wrench himself free.

Then he fell to the pavement, stunned and bleeding from a furious blow from the hand of the giant, who at the same instant, and with the agility of a cat, hit the officer a terrible blow with his huge fist, and without a sound the representative of the law went to earth also.

There was a hasty scuffling of feet on the pavement, and the two desperadoes disappeared around the corner.

They had been successful; their plans had worked, and they had escaped with their booty, but soon there would be trackers after them who would be tireless in the chase—who would never give up beaten.

And Max had said to himself that he would know them both again.

CHAPTER III. STRICKEN DOWN.

THE officer was the first to recover his wits and stagger to his feet.

His mind was not very clear as to what had happened.

He had met two men and a boy on the street, some one had cried "Help," and then he thought a mule had kicked him, or something resembling a catapult had struck him, and he had fallen senseless to the pavement.

He looked hastily around him for an explanation.

At that moment Max slowly raised himself to his feet.

In an instant the officer pounced upon him and seized him by the collar.

"You young villain!" he cried. "I've got you, anyhow. Come along!"

"What shall I come along for? What do you want with me?" asked Max, in a bewildered tone, for he was still considerably dazed from the effect of the blow he had received.

"You'll find out later," replied the policeman, grimly, jerking the boy along roughly.

"I have done nothing," said Max.

"Ain't, eh? We'll see about that."

"No; but those men who had me with them have just robbed a house in Remsen street."

"Oh!" derisively.

"Yes—Mr. Mordaunt's."

"How do you happen to know so much about it?" asked the officer, with a grin of disbelief.

"Because they took me there with them."

"Oh! they did, eh?"

"Yes. The big one first sent me there with a note for Mr. Mordaunt, and I guided him to Number—Fulton street, where the man said his nephew was lying, seriously hurt. When we got there they took us both prisoners, bound and

gagged Mr. Mordaunt, and taking me with them robbed his house of forty-five thousand dollars."

"That's a pretty good story, young fellow. Keep right on and you'll make a good one; but you can't pull the wool over my eyes. Not much, my covey. I'm too fly for you."

"Don't you believe me?" asked Max, indignantly.

"I'm not quite such an oyster as all that."

"It's the truth."

"Possibly."

"You can go to Number—Fulton street, up the stairs, first door to the right, and you will find Mr. Mordaunt bound and gagged in the room, as I told you."

"That may be, too, but I doubt it very much," said the officer. "You tell your story to the sergeant at the desk, and it will be looked into, but you'll be in safe-keeping in the mean time."

"What!" cried Max, "do you mean to say that you think I had anything to do with the thing?"

"It looks as though you had a great deal to do with it."

"I did—that is true—but they forced me to; I—"

"Sure!"

"One of them gave me some of the money, and I threw it at him."

The policeman looked at Max an instant in blank astonishment.

"That's the first nonsense you've talked," he said sharply. "I don't believe you now, anyway, and you'd better shut up till you get to the station-house."

They walked on in silence.

Presently the station-house was reached.

The officer told his story about being knocked down in the street without warning, to the sergeant, and added something of the story Max had told him of a robbery at Mr. Mordaunt's house.

Max was then asked the usual questions, and requested to make whatever statement he chose.

He told the sergeant all that had transpired, from the time he was called across the street by the burglar.

"Your great mistake was in not reporting at your office first," said the sergeant, not unkindly.

"Yes, sir," replied Max; "I know that now."

"You look honest," continued the officer in charge, "but some of these circumstances are very much against you, my boy."

"Must I be locked up?"

"Yes, for to-night at least."

"Can I send a letter to my mother, sir? she will be frightened if I do not get home at six in the morning."

"Have you money to pay a messenger?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will call one. Write your note but make it short," said the obliging sergeant, who liked Max's bright, frank eyes, and who really believed his story.

So Max wrote:

"DEAR MOTHER:—

"Do not be frightened about me if I am twenty-four hours late in getting home."

"In great haste,
MAXWELL."

The sergeant took it.

"I will see that it is sent," he said, and Max handed him the money to pay for it.

Then he was searched.

How thankful he was that he did not have that twenty-dollar gold-piece burning in his pocket.

"Your story will be investigated," said the sergeant as Max was being led away.

He was conducted down a long corridor, a door was unlocked, and in a moment more he found himself for the first time in a cell.

There was a gas-jet burning outside, and a feeble light flickered into the narrow place.

Max shuddered with a kind of unknown horror as he looked about him and realized where he was.

The chill of the place seemed to strike him with unnatural force, and he felt cold.

The narrow cot on which he was expected to sleep filled him with dread.

Sleep!

A troop of all the disreputable characters who had occupied that cot in the past seemed in a sort of vision to pass in review before him.

Burglars, petty thieves, tramps, drunks—he thought of them all, and he took his stand in the middle of the cell, resolved not to touch anything in it if he could avoid it.

"I am glad mother does not know where I

am," he thought, brushing a tear from his cheek that had oozed from his eye in spite of himself. "She would be horrified!"

And then he thought of his position with the telegraph company.

He knew the company was very severe, and he knew almost to a certainty that he would lose his place.

"I'm out of a job, sure," he mused, his thoughts going at once to the little salary which he always gave to his mother, "and it won't be very easy to get another, either. Jobs are scarce nowadays. Maybe Mr. Mordaunt will help me," remembering that gentleman's offer to meet just such an emergency as this one.

"Suppose these police officers should make him believe that I am concerned in this robbery?" his mind went on. "Suppose I should be convicted and sent to prison!" and he staggered to the cot and sat down upon it in the horror of the thought.

But he recovered himself almost instantly.

"I am innocent!" he exclaimed, aloud, "and they cannot convict me of a crime with which I had nothing to do. No; I do not think I need fear that."

He thought of the two men who had been the cause of all his trouble.

"I will get even with them, some day," he muttered, with a flash of the eyes and a clinching of the hands. "I wish I could be a detective; I would follow those villains to the ends of the earth! I would track them down and bring them to justice, if it took me a lifetime, and I think I could do it. *I know I could!*"

The City Hall clock struck two.

"Only two hours since that big man stopped me," thought Max. "It seems like two weeks, two years, two lifetimes—but it has taught me a life-long lesson."

And thus he sat and mused and thought, while the hours ticked themselves away.

It was a strange experience for a boy of sixteen years, but, though young, Max carried an old head on his broad, well-set shoulders, and he had pluck and determination sufficient to carry him through worse trials than these; and, indeed, he would need all his nerve, all his pluck, and all his tenacity in the experiences that were to follow closely upon this robbery.

Morning broke bright and clear after the storm, and a little streak of sunlight stole in through the apology for a window in the cell where Max was confined.

"I guess things will come out all right," thought Max, as he looked at it.

When it was time for him to go before the magistrate he felt very hopeful.

"Did some one go and release Mr. Mordaunt last night?" he asked, of the officer who conducted him up-stairs, but that worthy knew nothing about it.

Soon he found himself in the crowded, bad-smelling court-room.

He looked on curiously as the usual round of "regulars" were disposed of.

Presently his own name was called, and he was led forward to the bench.

"A messenger-boy," remarked the judge, looking sharply at Max. "What is he charged with? What? Burglary? Where is the officer who made the arrest?"

The officer stepped forward and told his story, making it as strong as he could against Max.

The judge listened with close attention.

"What have you to say to all that?" asked the judge, of Max, when the officer had finished.

For the second time Max told his side of the story.

Just as he finished, the door opened hastily, and Mr. Mordaunt, closely followed by a prominent lawyer of Brooklyn, entered.

He made some remark in an undertone to the lawyer, who stepped hastily forward.

"I appear for this young man, your Honor," he said, "at the request of Mr. Mordaunt, who is the owner of the house that was entered, and who would like to be heard before any formal charge is entered against this boy."

"Very well," said the judge. "Let Mr. Mordaunt be sworn."

In less than half an hour, the entire proceedings against Max were scratched out of existence, and the judge declared that there was no evidence except that he was thoroughly honest, and would have prevented the robbery if he could.

Max was discharged.

He left the court-room with Mr. Mordaunt.

"Go to the office first," said that gentleman to him; "then to your mother, and then come

to my house, and get there as soon as you can, as I want to have a talk with you. Go now!"

Max thanked him with tears in his eyes, and started off on a run to do his bidding.

It did not take him long to reach the office, and when there he went immediately to the manager and again related his story, adding that he could prove his statement by Mr. Mordaunt and others.

The manager liked Max, he having always been faithful in the discharge of his duty before that, and after delivering rather a severe lecture to him upon the absolute necessity of implicitly obeying the company's regulations in the future, told him that his offense would be overlooked that time, but that should anything of the kind occur again, he would lose his place at once.

Highly elate at his good fortune, the boy started homeward briskly, it being his time off duty.

But he was anxious to give the good news to Mr. Mordaunt as well, and so, after relating the circumstances to his mother, and getting her permission, he hurried to the Remsen street house.

Upon ascending the steps, Max was surprised to find the front door partly open, but he paused and rung the bell.

No answer, and presently he rung again, and again no answer.

Three, four, five times he rung, but no one replied to the summons, and Max began to fear that something was wrong inside.

He did not know what to do. Would it be proper for him to push the door open, as he plainly saw he could do, and enter? or should he run to the station-house and get an officer to return with him?

The last thought seemed the best, but then, if nothing had happened, such a course might greatly annoy Mr. Mordaunt, and so, after considerable hesitation, Max pushed the door open and passed through into the broad hallway.

He glanced into the parlor, but saw that no one was there, and then ascended the stairs, having determined to go to the room where the money had been stolen.

As he went up, he fancied that he could hear a moaning sound from the room he was approaching, as though some one was there and in great pain.

Quickening his steps, he sprung into the apartment, and then started back with a cry of dismay.

Upon the floor, between the table and the window, lay Mr. Mordaunt, and by his side a revolver.

The gentleman was moaning a little, and Max sprung to his side, and raised his head from the floor.

"Mr. Mordaunt!" he cried, "Mr. Mordaunt!" but that person could not answer. He sighed deeply, and then the moaning ceased. His head sunk back limp upon Max Merry's arm, and so far as the boy could perceive, he no longer breathed.

Just then a heavy voice broke the silence, and Max, turning, with a cry of fright, for he had thought they were alone, beheld the tall, uniformed figure of a policeman standing in the doorway.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE SUMMONS.

THE instant that Max saw that it was a policeman who had spoken to him from the doorway as he knelt by the body of Mr. Mordaunt, his fears fled, for he saw in him the means of immediate assistance.

"I am so glad you have come!" exclaimed the boy, to whom so much had happened in so short a time; "some one has shot Mr. Mordaunt. I will run for an ambulance."

By the time Max had ceased speaking, the officer was at his side, and as the young messenger sprung to his feet to carry out his suggestion, he placed a heavy hand upon him.

"Not yet," he said; "wait—I will go with you when you go. Is the man dead?"

"Oh, I hope not!" cried Max.

The officer looked at him curiously, and then bent over the silent form of the old gentleman.

"He breathes a little," he said, rising. "Come, youngster—we'll go now."

"There is no need of our both going," said Max. "Go for assistance; there are half a dozen doctors on this block."

"You must come along, anyway," replied the officer, and he seized Max by the arm.

But the boy was not to be led thus easily, and wrenching himself free with a sudden jerk, he sprung through the door, and, throwing him-

self astride of the banister, landed upon the lower floor in an instant, and by the time the officer had reached the top of the stairs, Max was upon the pavement outside.

He dashed across the street and up the steps of a house opposite which bore a physician's sign, and pulled the bell sharply three or four times.

It so happened that the bell was quickly answered, the door opening immediately, and Max was admitted before the officer had emerged from the house opposite.

"Is the doctor in?" exclaimed Max, breathlessly.

"Yes, I am the doctor," replied a pleasant-faced gentleman; "what can I do for you?"

"Mr. Mordaunt, across the street, has been shot," cried Max.

"Shot! Mordaunt! Impossible!"

"It's true, though! Please come quick; he was breathing when I came away, and maybe you can save him."

The doctor did not require a second bidding. Mr. Mordaunt was well known to him, and with a hasty word of apology to the gentleman who was just leaving, he seized his instrument-case and hurried across the street, closely followed by Max, who in a few words explained to the doctor how it was that he had found Mr. Mordaunt, and also told him of the officer's sudden appearance.

The latter individual was nowhere to be seen, and Max concluded that he was still in chase of him.

A moment more brought them to the room where the stricken gentleman still lay upon the floor as Max had seen him last.

The doctor bent over him and found, as Max had correctly surmised, that he had been shot.

Restoratives were quickly applied, and at last, just as an ambulance came rattling up, and the officer who had surprised Max arrived, Mr. Mordaunt feebly opened his eyes and looked about him.

He seemed instantly to remember what had taken place, for he turned his eyes toward the boy and murmured:

"They have finished the job, Maxwell. Doctor is there any hope for me?"

"I am afraid not, old friend."

Mr. Mordaunt smiled a little sadly, as he said in reply:

"Better me than some one else who has loved ones to mourn for him."

"Do you know who shot you?" asked the policeman, stepping up officially.

"No—I wish I did," replied the stricken man, painfully; "I wish I did."

"Did you see the person who did it?"

"Yes."

"Can you describe him?"

"No; I had been out; was just returning—came to my room—opened the door, saw a man at my cabinet there, spoke to him and he turned and shot me; tried to run by me; I grabbed at him, caught the pistol, jerked it out of his hand; he ran on; last I remember."

"What kind of a looking man was he?"

"Don't remember well—tall—wore a beard."

"You are sure it was not this boy?"

"That boy! What, Maxwell? Yes, yes; I am sure it was not he. Now leave me, please. The doctor will care for me. How long can I live, doctor?"

"A few hours only, old friend; you are bleeding internally."

"Maxwell," continued Mr. Mordaunt, and though his voice was husky and weak, and he sometimes breathed with difficulty, there was still something of the old ring in it, as he spoke; "run for Judge Curtis and bring him here; if you can't find him, bring the first lawyer you can get—go!"

Like a shot Max dashed from the house and down the street toward the City Hall, and in a very short space of time the judge was ushered into the presence of the dying man.

"Can I do anything more for you, Mr. Mordaunt?" asked our hero.

"No, Maxwell, no—no—nothing more—Good-by, my boy—remember all I told you—be a man—a good man—watch the nest-egg. Good-by."

When Max was once more out in the street he felt as though he had parted with a dear friend. True, he had only known Mr. Mordaunt a few hours, but there was that about him which had made it seem years instead.

"Poor old gentleman," murmured the boy, "robbed and murdered. I wonder if the same fellow shot him that robbed him. That hardly seems probable, for they knew that nothing was left in the cabinet worth taking, and yet Mr. Mordaunt distinctly said that he saw a man at

his cabinet. That would seem to indicate that the person who did the shooting did not know that the robbery had been committed the night before.

"I wonder if I shall ever see either of those two fellows," he mused on. "I would know the voice of the one called Tom anywhere, and I am very certain I would recognize the other also. I will, for sure, if I can catch sight of his car. By the way, I forgot to give that part of his description to the police. They don't know that I clipped off a piece of his ear with that twenty-dollar gold-piece. Whew! who'd have thought that I would be using double-eagles for stones to fling, or meet with the experiences I have gone through with in the last few hours. Well, I'll go back home and go to bed. One thing is certain, I haven't lost my place yet, anyway, and that's lucky."

Max quickened his pace into a dog's-trot, and was soon ensconced in his bed, forgetful of all thrilling events, in a deep and restful slumber.

At four o'clock his mother called him, for he had to present himself at the office at six that night, and after partaking of the simple yet hearty meal which she had provided, he once more went on his way toward the place of his employment.

He had reported at the desk and taken his seat when there came a loud call.

"Number Nineteen!"

"Hello!" thought Max, "they mean to have me make up for lost time, I guess, for that's my number."

And he presented himself quickly at the window.

"Here, sir," he said, cheerily.

"Wanted in the manager's room," was the laconic order he received, and Max started away, inwardly fearing that he was yet to receive his discharge; fearing that he had congratulated himself too soon.

"Nineteen?" said the manager, as if he had forgotten all about the event of the morning, "your name is—"

"Maxwell Merry, sir."

"All right. Here is a letter I just received; read it."

Max, wondering a little, took the letter and read:

LAW OFFICES OF
B. F. & F. A. CURTIS,
942 GARFIELD BUILDING.

BROOKLYN, October —, 18—.

DEAR SIR:—You have in your employ a young man named Maxwell Merry. Will you send him to my office at nine o'clock to-morrow morning on business of vast importance?

Very truly yours,
B. F. CURTIS,
G.

"Do you understand?" asked the manager.

"Yes, sir; but—"

"Never mind the 'but.' Report at Judge Curtis's office at nine in the morning without fail, and to insure your being prompt, you may have to-night off."

"Thank you, sir," said Max. "You are very kind to me."

"All right, Nineteen."

And the manager turned once more to his writing, while Max hurried away to talk over the strange summons with his mother.

What could it mean? Judge Curtis was the lawyer he had summoned at the request of Mr. Mordaunt, and what could be wanted of him now? More of the story of the robbery? No. Testimony as to precisely what he saw when he entered the room where Mr. Mordaunt had been shot? Yes; that must be it. Anyway, he would be on time. Perhaps Mr. Mordaunt was dead, and they wanted him to appear before the coroner. Perhaps— Well, the morning would unfold the secret.

CHAPTER V.

A HARD TASK.

THE City Hall clock was just striking nine, the following morning, when Max presented himself at Judge Curtis's office, and upon giving his name, he was immediately shown into the lawyer's private room.

"Good-morning, young man," said the judge, pleasantly, and at the same time eying the messenger-boy sharply. "You are on time, I see."

"Yes, sir."

"Your name is Maxwell Merry, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you are the young man that came for me yesterday at the wish of Mr. Mordaunt?"

"Yes, sir. Please tell me how is Mr. Mordaunt?"

"He is dead."

"Dead!" and great tears of real sorrow stood in the boy's eyes.

"Yes, he died about four o'clock yesterday afternoon, but he left a message for you."

"For me?"

"Yes. Before I give it to you, however, I want to ask you some questions."

"Yes, sir."

"How old are you?"

"Nearly seventeen, sir."

"Do you live at home?"

"Yes, sir—with my mother; my father is dead."

"You are a messenger-boy now, I see."

"Yes, sir."

"You were with Mr. Mordaunt when he was bound and gagged, night before last, were you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the men who assaulted him took you to his house with them, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see them take the money?"

"I did."

"Did you get a good look at either of them?"

"Yes, sir—at both."

"Would you know them again?"

"I think so, sir."

"You are not certain, eh?"

"I am quite certain, sir, though I might not."

"Was there any particular mark about either of them by which you would be more apt to recognize him?"

"One was a very large man with a very gruff voice, and there is a little piece gone from the bottom of his left ear."

"Clipped off?"

"Yes, sir; as slick as though it had been done by a razor instead of a gold-piece."

"A gold-piece!"

"Yes, sir. He offered me a gold-piece out of the money he stole, and I threw it at him, and it cut off a piece of his ear."

"Good! I begin to think that you will do nicely."

"Sir?"

"How about the other one?" continued the lawyer.

"He was ordinary size, but had a very peculiar voice. Different from any that I ever heard before."

"Perhaps he was disguising it for your benefit."

"I don't think he could disguise it, sir; he could not hide the twang in it."

"Ah, well—anything more?"

"They both wore false beards."

"How do you know that?"

"I saw them, sir."

"Have you any suspicion now as to who they were?"

"No, sir, none. I am pretty well satisfied as to one point, though."

"What is that?"

"They are not professional burglars or thieves."

"Why do you think that?"

"I can't explain exactly, sir, only that I came to that conclusion. The small one was frightened and nervous all the time, and in a great hurry to get away, while the big one went to the other extreme and was reckless; apparently not afraid of anything."

"Did you notice anything more?"

"Yes, sir."

"What?"

"That they seemed to be thoroughly posted."

"How so?"

"They knew where everything was, and just how to get at it when they got to it. Another thing—"

"Well?"

"The small man knew how much money was in the cabinet, for I heard him tell the big one."

"How much did he say?"

"Forty-five thousand dollars."

"Ahem! he was pretty near correct in that, surely, as that is the amount less a few hundreds, that was taken. How did they take the money away?"

"In a satchel."

"Did you notice that?"

"Yes, sir; it was an ordinary black leather bag."

"Anything peculiar about it?"

"No, sir; nothing."

"Now, young man, if, in your travels about the city, you should meet one or both of those men, would you have courage enough to follow them, find out where they went, and then ask an officer to arrest them?"

"Yes, sir. I should."

The tone in which Max said the few words in reply to the lawyer's last question, though quiet and unostentatious, was yet so firm and self-reliant that Judge Curtis smiled approvingly.

"Another question," continued the man of law. "Suppose that you were commissioned to search for those fellows, and paid well for your time, do you think that you could accomplish such a difficult task?"

"I do not know, sir. I should not like to take the responsibility of trying."

"You would not?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because I think I am too young; that older and more experienced persons would do better in the search than I. Such a task belongs to regularly-trained detectives."

"Yes, yes. I know that; but suppose again that you, for many reasons, were preferred to a trained detective, what then?"

"I should decline to serve," was Max's reply, spoken in a firm tone.

"Ah! Well, now I will give you Mr. Mordaunt's message. As you may have concluded, he sent for me to draw his will, and although his strength was failing very rapidly, we had plenty of time to finish it. In that will he has bequeathed an amount of money to me as trustee, and it is to be used in prosecuting the search for the men who robbed him of the forty-five thousand dollars. He evidently thought, as I think, that it was one of the men that robbed him, who afterward shot him."

"I do not think so," said Max.

"Well, we will pass that now, and I will proceed with what I am telling you. The amount left with me as trustee was incumbered with a proviso which reads as follows: 'Provided that the said Maxwell Merry—'"

Max leaped from his chair, too much astonished to speak, but the judge waved him back again and went on calmly:

"—Will consent to conduct the said search and prosecution herein before mentioned, as he shall be instructed by my friend, Judge B. F. Curtis; but if the said Maxwell Merry shall decline to carry out my wishes, then, and in that case, I bequeath the amount hereby set apart, absolutely, to him, the said Maxwell Merry. What do you think of that, eh?" asked the lawyer. "Rather a peculiar clause, isn't it, young man?"

"Why!" exclaimed Max, breathlessly, "it is putting a premium upon my declining to do as he wished. As I understand you, in one case I am to have only what you choose to give me, and in the other I am absolute owner of the money; is that correct, sir?"

"Yes. But I have not yet given you the message. When the will was finished and executed, Mr. Mordaunt said to me:

"Tell the young man, Maxwell, that it is my last wish that he will bring those fellows to justice, for one of them has ended my life before I was ready to go. I have no relative in the world except a nephew, who has always been a curse to me, and who, I strongly suspect, was in complicity with these scoundrels; and tell him further that I have worded that clause of my will thus, because I rely upon his generosity rather than his desire for gain. He will be paid better for the work he will do for me than he could possibly be as a messenger-boy, and I think when he understands that it is my wish that he does this, he will consent."

"Now, young man," went on the judge, "I will add a few words of my own. When the will was drawn, I did all in my power to dissuade Mr. Mordaunt from the idea he had, of turning you into a detective. I argued with him that it would be much better to engage an experienced man for this business, but to no purpose. He was determined, and I was obliged to write the will as he wished."

"It is my duty to tell you that unless you would injure your own prospects by so doing, it is your duty to conform to his wish. The money left for the purpose is a considerable amount, and if you decline to accept the task, it goes to you absolutely. It was Mr. Mordaunt's way of forcing you to do as he desired, for he said that you would, when you knew all, consent. That is all; I make no further comment. You must now decide for yourself."

"Sir," said Max, slowly, "Mr. Mordaunt was right in saying that I would carry out his wishes. I do not know what more to say. I did not expect anything of the kind; I had no idea that he thought of me other than as a mere messenger-boy who had done my duty. I will accept the task, sir, and do my best, but

the responsibility is terrible, and I do not know where to begin."

"You are to begin here," said the judge. "I am to furnish you with the means you may require from time to time, and you are to keep me informed of what you are doing. When the task is completed, and you have carried out the wishes of Mr. Mordaunt, I have a letter for you, written at his dictation, which you are to read, but until then it must remain in my safe."

"Go home now, and think over your plans, and come to me again to-morrow at nine o'clock, prepared to commence operations. You have a hard task before you, one in which success is very doubtful."

CHAPTER VI.

TAKEN PRISONER.

PROMPTLY at nine o'clock on the morning following, Maxwell Merry presented himself at the office of Judge Curtis, ready to begin his duties as detective.

He had talked the matter over thoroughly with his mother, and although she feared the dangers into which her boy must go, in the new business he was to undertake, she, like him, saw the necessity of it.

"You are forced to be a detective in spite of yourself, my son," she said, "and you must be a good one. Mr. Mordaunt has left behind him a duty for you to fulfill, and you must do it well. Never forget your mother, and her teachings. Let me know where you are as often as you can, and, on the other hand, if it should happen that you cannot keep me fully informed, I will endeavor to look always upon the bright side."

She was a grand, good mother, stout of heart for everything concerning her loved son, who was all the world to her, and who was growing up so manly, so hopeful, so honest, upright and courageous. The temptations into which he would of necessity be thrown, she did not fear, for she knew that they would flit by as they came, leaving him unharmed.

"Good-morning, Maxwell," said the judge, when the boy entered his office; "prompt again, I see."

"Yes, sir, and ready to begin my work. I have been to the office and resigned my position there, and wish to commence my duties here without delay."

"Good, my boy—good! I begin to think that perhaps Mr. Mordaunt did not make a mistake after all. I will give you the few instructions I have for you, and after that you must direct your own energies."

"Yes, sir."

"In the first place," continued the good old judge, "you are to consider me as your principal; come to me when you want money, and report progress to me as often as you have anything to report, or as often as convenient."

"I will not disguise from you the fact that the regular police are working upon the case, as it is their duty to do, and I will tell you their theory of it, as it may assist you in starting out."

"Thank you, sir."

"It is the theory of the police," said Judge Curtis, slowly, "that the burglars and the murderer are the same. They believe that when the robbery was committed, something of importance was left behind, or, something tending to betray their identity was dropped; that one of them returned for it, whatever it was, and that Mr. Mordaunt surprised him, and then followed the shooting."

"That is all I know of their *modus operandi*; what do you think of it?"

"Very little," replied Max, promptly, "although when I think of my inexperience and their constant association with crime, I am almost afraid to say so. However, I do not believe that the robbers know yet that Mr. Mordaunt has been killed, unless they saw it in the papers. You must remember that I was with them when the robbery was committed, and that I saw and studied every move that was made by them, and I am convinced, not only that they took everything they wanted, but that they left nothing behind of their own, which would be calculated to betray their identity."

"What, then, is your theory of the murder?"

"I have none yet, but may I ask you a few questions?"

"Certainly."

"Who is the executor of Mr. Mordaunt's will?"

"I am sole executor."

"Have you looked over his effects, yet?"

"Very little—some."

"His letters?"

"A few of his business letters, yes."

"Any of his private correspondence?"

"No. I had not intended to; I thought I would burn them."

"If you will forgive me for the impertinence, sir, I think that would be very foolish."

"Why so, Maxwell?"

"Because, sir, it is possible, nay, almost probable, that you would find something there which would give us a clew to work upon. There are three causes which might have led to the killing."

"What are they?"

"The first, and most improbable one, is that it was done by an ordinary sneak-thief, who entered the house in Mr. Mordaunt's absence, and, being surprised by him, fired the fatal shot."

"Well?"

"The second, and more probable one, is that some person other than either of the robbers of the previous night knew that Mr. Mordaunt had a large amount of money in the house, and watching until an opportunity offered, had entered, been surprised, and fired the shot."

"And the third?"

"The third is very much the same as the second, with the difference that I have rather come to the conclusion that it was done by some one known personally to Mr. Mordaunt, and if that is so, there may have been some writing in his possession which would help us. There are two reasons for my thinking as I do. One is that Mr. Mordaunt has directed me to hunt for the burglars, without mentioning the murderer, and the other is, that I cannot help thinking that he did not describe the man who shot him as well as he might have done, had he cared to be more explicit."

"There is something in what you say, surely."

"You are aware," continued Max, "that his nephew was used as a decoy the night I was sent to lead him into the trap?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that nephew?"

"No."

"Have you ever seen him?"

"No—never."

"Did Mr. Mordaunt remember him in his will?"

"Yes."

"To what extent?"

"Ten thousand dollars," hesitatingly replied the judge, "but it was trusteed so that he can only have it in installments."

"Ah! How much property did Mr. Mordaunt leave?"

"A very large amount."

"Much more than he gave his nephew?"

"Twenty times as much."

"Had he other relatives?"

"No—none."

"Then it follows naturally that he and his nephew were not on good terms, does it not?"

"Yes, I think it does."

"You do not know the nephew, and have never seen him, you say. Do you know anything concerning him or his whereabouts?"

"Very little. I know that he is wild and dissolute, gambles, and is generally anything but a promising young man. His uncle has many times got him out of scrapes, paid his debts for him, etc., and never got much thanks for it, either."

"How old is he?"

"Between twenty-one and twenty-five; I don't know exactly."

"Is his name Mordaunt?"

"No—his name is Graff. He was the son of Mr. Mordaunt's deceased sister."

"Is his father living?"

"Yes, but worse than dead, for he is in an Insane Asylum, hopelessly mad."

"What is the son's first name?"

"Kilian, like his father's."

"Kilian Graff," mused Max; "a peculiar name, and one easy to remember. Now, sir," he continued, "will you do me a favor?"

"If I can."

"Go this evening to the house of Mr. Mordaunt and look over his private papers as thoroughly as you can. Lay aside for me any you find which you think may possibly be of interest in this matter. In the mean time I will look around me a little for a theory to work upon, and to-morrow morning I will come here again. If, during the day, you can use your influence with the District Telegraph Company for them to allow me without question to wear their uniform when I see fit, I should be very glad. There may be times when it will come in very handy, and I shall wear it only at such times."

As Max was leaving the office, the judge handed him a roll of bills.

"Here is one hundred dollars," he said. "Spend whatever is necessary, without stint,

but none foolishly. When that is gone, or nearly so, ask for more, and at the same time hand me a statement of your expenditures. Your salary will be paid to your mother each month, for you are to pay your own expenses entire, with the money I give you."

In a moment more, Max was in the street.

Where to go first? what first to do? how to begin? It is easy enough to become a detective in theory, but when forced into actual practice the thing is not so simple—at least so thought Max, as he stood hesitatingly upon the corner of Montague street, not knowing which way to turn first.

But as the most-looked-for events never happen, so are the least-expected ones likely to occur, and it transpired that, as he stood there meditating, a voice behind him startled him, so that he turned like lightning, not to see who had spoken, but who had been addressed.

"Hello, Graff," the voice said; "I hear you have come into a fortune," and as Max turned he saw two young men shaking hands about ten feet distant from where he was standing.

"He might better have kept it," replied the one called Graff, ungraciously, "for all the good it will do me. Which way are you going?"

"Over the bridge."

"I'll go with you."

They started away down Fulton street, and behind them went Max, satisfied that he was following Kilian Graff, the nephew, whom he could not help suspecting of complicity in one or both of the crimes against Mr. Mordaunt.

"I'm in luck, anyhow," thought Max, as he entered a bridge car behind them, "for I will keep along with this fellow until I find out his haunts or where he lives, and then when I want him again, I'll know where to look for him."

Once in a billiard-room, he got close enough to hear part of what they were saying, and they had evidently just resumed the subject referred to on their meeting.

"How much did he leave you, old chap?" asked the stranger of Graff.

"Eighty-three dollars and thirty-three cents per month for ten years. Munificent, wasn't it, eh?" with a sneer.

"Better than nothing, though."

"Bah! I'd as soon have nothing."

"What became of the balance of his shekels?"

"Judge Curtis got a little; my old man's bills are paid as long as he lives, with a reversion to the Asylum when he dies, and the balance goes to a detective."

"To what?"

"A detective, named Merry; somebody who is to spend the remainder of his life in hunting down—That's my game. Pay up and let's get out."

Out they went, and Max behind them, but although he passed through the door not more than a minute behind them, they had disappeared entirely from view.

While he stood there, glancing hurriedly up and down the narrow street, a colored boy came rapidly up to him.

"Is your name Merry?" he asked breathlessly.

"Yes, why?"

"Judge Curtis wants ye right away."

"Where is he?"

"Up-stairs on de block below. He saw ye go in hyer, an' axed me ter come fo' ye, see? He wants ter speak ter ye quick on important biz, see?"

"All right," said Max, quickly, "show me the way and I will go to him. I can look for the nephew another time," he thought, as he hurried along after the darky.

On the block below they entered a narrow doorway and began mounting a flight of very steep stairs.

At the top was a door with a wicket, at which his conductor rapped sharply.

The wicket moved—an eye appeared and disappeared—the door opened, and they entered.

But where? Max looked around him in surprise at the costly elegance of the apartment, and was just about to speak when a door at the further end of the room opened, and through it it came the figure of Kilian Graff.

Max uttered a cry of surprise, and sprung toward the door by which he had entered, only to find a brawny negro opposing his passage.

"Easy, my boy, easy," exclaimed Graff coolly; "you have been following me all the morning, so I thought I'd let you find me. When we part company, you will know me better, I think. Just march into that room I came out of, in double-quick time," and he pointed a revolver at the boy's head by way of argument.

CHAPTER VII.

A LEAP FOR LIBERTY.

MAX saw plainly, when the revolver in the hands of Kilian Graff was pointed at him, that there was nothing for him to do but obey the command and pass into the adjoining room, and therefore without hesitation he did so.

He was followed immediately by Mr. Mordaunt's wayward nephew, who closed and locked the door behind him, putting the key in his pocket. In the room was the person who had been with Graff all the morning.

"Now, young fellow," said Graff, when the door was locked, "I've got you where I want you, and if you don't answer a few questions I shall ask you, truthfully, you will be sorry."

Max made no reply, and after waiting a moment for one, the young gambler continued:

"What have you been following me all the morning for, eh?"

"Who said I was following you?" replied Max.

"I said so; I have seen you. Why have you done it?"

"I haven't admitted that I did follow you, yet," returned Max.

"Look here, sonny," said Kilian Graff, "just you keep in mind the fact that I don't want any freshness from you at all, and if you don't answer my questions when I ask them, you'll have to stay here till you do, that's all. Now answer."

"Well, if I did follow you—what then?"

"Why did you do it?"

"Magnetic attraction, probably."

Graff scowled darkly.

"Why did you do it?" he repeated.

"When people are followed," replied Max, coolly, "it is usually to find out where they go."

"Oh, you are beginning to talk, are you? Now who told you to follow me?"

"Nobody."

"That won't do, youngster."

"It will have to, because it is the truth."

"I don't believe it."

For reply Max shrugged his shoulders disdainfully.

"Your name is Merry, isn't it?" was the next question.

"It is," said Max.

"Is your father a detective?"

Max saw instantly the mistake into which Kilian Graff had fallen, and so, instead of saying at once that he had no father, he merely said:

"No."

"Your brother, then?"

"No."

"Have you a relative who is? or do you know of any one by the name of Merry, who is?"

"No."

"Are you one yourself."

"Hardly," was Max's reply, and he answered as he did because he reasoned that although he might be said to be budding, he was quite sure that he had not yet blossomed into one.

"Do you know a man named Mordaunt?" was the next question.

"No."

"Did you ever know such a man?"

"Yes."

"Ah! when?"

"A few days ago."

"Where is he now?"

"You know well enough," replied Max indignantly, for he was appalled at the other's lack of feeling or respect.

"Yes," went on Graff, "he is in his grave. Are you a beneficiary under his will?"

"A what?"

"Did he leave you anything in his will?"

"No."

"You lie, youngster."

"I do not; I tell the truth."

"Is your first name Maxwell?"

"None of your business."

"Oh, it isn't, eh? Who told you to follow me?"

"Nobody."

"You did it of your own free will, eh?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"For instance."

"Will you or will you not tell me what for?"

"I will tell you nothing except this: If you keep me here any longer against my will, I'll make you suffer for it when I do get out, but if you will open the door and allow me to go now—"

"That will do, sonny," broke in Graff sarcastically, "I have witnesses and you have not, so we won't discuss that point. What I want to

know, is this: Who set you to follow me, and what it was done for. When you get ready to tell me, you can rap on this door and the message will be brought to me. Until then, you will remain in this room, no matter whether it is a day, or a week or a year," and motioning to his friend to follow, he unlocked the door and Max was presently alone.

He had no doubt that he was in a gambling-house, for this one had looked, as he passed through the outer room, very much as he had heard them described, and even the room he was in, though small, bore every appearance of being used for that purpose. There was the round table covered with green cloth, and many piles of differently-colored ivory pieces.

Throwing himself upon a sofa, which was evidently little used, he gave himself up to reflection.

"I'm in a pretty mess," he thought, "and no mistake. At the very start in my unchosen profession, I'm captured like a squirrel and shut up until I tell something which can't be told without lying. I told him the truth and he won't believe me, and I have either got to make up a story to please this Kilian Graff, or stay on here indefinitely. One thing is clear, I've got to get out somehow."

"There is a window," he murmured, as his vision flew from one part of the little apartment to another, "but it looks as though it hadn't been opened since the house was built, and that must be a century. Probably the blinds are nailed fast, besides, for this room is only one story high, and they don't want people looking in here after the gas is lighted. Anyhow, I'll just see if I can get a look out."

Suiting the action to the word, Max arose from the sofa and went toward the window, but try as he might, his strength could make no movement in the massive casing, which clung as tightly to the molding as though glued there.

Suddenly, as he was straining every nerve, he felt something give a little, and pausing to see what it was, discovered that one of the large panes of glass of which the window was composed had a little extra frame upon it, and was swung on hinges, so that it could be opened to admit the air without raising the casing.

"That hole is plenty big enough for me to get through," he thought, "if I could only get the blind open, but that is probably impossible."

He examined the fastenings, and saw that they were merely the ordinary catches of an outside blind, but that over each of them had been driven an iron staple which held the whole blind tightly, immovably in its place.

One of the articles in Max's pocket was a jack-knife, given him the Christmas before by his mother, and it was one of the kind which contains all sorts of implements; two blades, scissors, a cork-screw, a gimlet, a small saw, a jab—used for breaking wire or cleaning a Lorse's hoof—a bradawl, etc., etc., and as quick as thought he brought it out.

Opening the gimlet, he selected the staple covering the catch to the blind which closed outside of the other one, and began boring into the sill as close to the iron as he could force the little tool.

It was rather tedious work, for the wood had become thoroughly seasoned and hard, and the iron kept wearing off the edges of his gimlet, but though blisters formed upon his hands he kept diligently to work, knowing that if he could once get the blind open it would be an easy matter to attract the attention of some one passing in the street, and by sending for the police, thus effect his escape.

One hole was finished, and then he began on the other, working steadily and hard.

"Now," he said to himself when the other was completed, "I'll just crowd the jab under that staple, and maybe I can move it."

Closing up the gimlet, he opened the jab and with considerable effort managed to get it under the staple.

Then applying all his strength, he bore down upon the knife-handle.

For an instant there was no perceptible effect, but then something began to give. Slowly, at first, then faster and faster, and in a moment more the staple (which had been put there to keep the blind shut and not to prevent prisoners from escaping) came out of the wood with a bound.

Stepping back hastily, after raising the catch, Max put his foot against the shutters and pushed with all his might.

The blind, though weather-beaten into its place, could not resist the pressure, and it flew open quickly.

With a glad cry Max put his knife back into his pocket, and looked out.

"I'm in luck!" he exclaimed, for there, just under the window, was the balcony of an old fire-escape.

It was the work of but a moment to crowd himself through the aperture made by the open window-pane, and he was soon standing upon the balcony referred to.

Reaching back into the room behind him, he closed the little door through which he had come, and then the blind, being additionally gratified to hear the catch snap back into place as he did so.

"It will take them a little while to find how I got out," he thought. "The next thing is to get down from here."

Underneath him was an awning, and beneath that, the sidewalk.

The distance was not too great for him to drop, with safety, but there was the danger connected with it that one of the employees of the place he had just left might be near, and thus he would run the danger of being speedily recaptured.

Just then, an ash-cart, nearly full of ashes from the barrels along the street, stopped exactly beneath him.

"There's my chance," thought Max. "Make or break!"

Without a moment's hesitation he climbed upon the railing of the balcony, and measuring his distance carefully, leaped out into the air.

True to his calculations, he landed upon the load of ashes, much to the astonishment of the man who was busily emptying the barrels which his two assistants had just handed up to him.

None of them knew from whence he had come, and a cloud of ashes so filled the eyes of passers-by that they did not notice him.

Without pausing to make useless explanations he sprung to the ground and dashed around the nearest corner like a flash; running almost into the arms of a policeman.

"I'm a messenger-boy," he explained to the surprised officer, beginning to dust the ashes from his clothes, "and those fellows chuck me into the cart."

The officer laughed and told him to go and clean his clothes somewhere before he reported for duty again, and walked on.

Near by was a boot-black, and Max got him to use his brushes, so that in a few moments the most of the ashes were removed.

When the job was done, he started away with a light heart, soon emerging into Park Row, up which he hurried toward the bridge, but he had scarcely taken a hundred steps when he came very unexpectedly face to face with Kilian Graff.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST DEAL.

MAX saw instantly that Graff had recognized him, and, being very quick in getting at conclusions, he resolved to put a bold face on the matter, so he looked up and nodded pleasantly, as he said:

"Good-day, Mr. Graff," and passed rapidly on.

Kilian Graff was nonplussed by the occurrence. Here was a boy whom two hours before he had left securely locked in one of the private rooms of a still more private gambling-house, and now he was on the street walking along as unconcernedly as though the thing were an every-day event, and not worthy of comment.

How had he escaped? Had the place been raided? Had the boy managed to attract attention through the shutters and thus called down a posse of police upon them in their hitherto secure and undisturbed retreat?

Such thoughts whirled through the brain of Kilian Graff with the speed of lightning, so that ere Max had got ten feet past him he turned, and with a bound or two had seized the boy by his arm.

"What's the matter now, sir?" asked Max, with an innocent look of surprise on his face.

"How did you get out?" exclaimed Graff, anxiously, holding the young messenger tightly as he spoke.

"Out of what? the menagerie? Do you take me for a chimpanzee, Mr. Graff?"

"None of your sass! Tell me how you got out."

"Out of where or what?"

"Out of my—that is—the room where I placed you."

"Was that your room?"

"Yes—no, of course not—confound you!" and he gave Max an ugly shake.

"Quit that!" said Merry, shortly. "You had me a little while ago where you could do that sort of thing, but you had best be more civil in

the street, Mr. Graff. Let go of my arm, and I'll tell you how I got out."

"Well, tell me, then," and Graff let go his hold.

"I suppose you are not the only one who has a key to that door, are you?" asked Max.

"No, I'm not."

"And it is quite natural that the others, knowing that you had a curiosity locked up there, should want to see it, eh?"

"What of that?"

"This. When you put me in there I had considerable in my pocket, a part of which opened the door for me, and like any other tragedian, I exited, see?" and Max turned and darted away on a run, leaving Kilian Graff under the impression that one of the men there had been bribed to release the captive.

But he was not to be foiled so easily, he told himself. He was becoming more and more convinced that the boy knew many things which he as the nephew of Mr. Mordaunt, deceased, would like to learn, and keeping Max well in sight, he hurried along after him.

They were going toward the Bridge at a rapid pace, Graff not knowing precisely what he would do, but determined to get the boy where he could force him to talk, if possible.

"Hello, Kil; whereaway so fast?" suddenly exclaimed a rough voice, just as he was going in at the Bridge entrance.

"Just the man I want!" cried Graff, seizing the person who had addressed him and dragging him along. "Come with me," he added, "and I'll explain as we go," and they hurried through the gate toward the stairs, up which Max had already disappeared.

The new-comer was of that nondescript class which infests the streets of large cities, who are always well-dressed; who usually have money about them to spend, but who seem to have no occupation whatever; who look like gentlemen, and when occasion requires can play the part very well, but who are really entered upon the municipal book as "shady," which, being translated, means that they are of the criminal class, but have as yet managed to avoid detection in their transactions. This particular one was faultlessly attired, and upon his shirt-front sparkled a diamond of the first water. He was a large man, though not remarkably so, with dark, piercing eyes, restless and wary, while a heavy black mustache concealed the lines of a hard, cruel mouth.

His name was—or was supposed to be—Charles Prince, though among his familiars he was known as Prince Charley.

"Where are you taking me to?" he growled, as Graff hurried him along toward the cars. "I am going the other way, man, not to Churchtown."

"Come ahead," replied Graff. "I'll explain as soon as I get you on the cars; it's important."

They were just in time to step aboard the last car as the bell rung for it to start, and Graff, noticing quickly that Max was not in that car, drew his companion into a seat by the rear door to explain, but as he was taking his seat, he glanced from the window, just in time to see Max, who was standing upon the platform past which the cars were by that time running rapidly.

The messenger-boy was kissing his fingers through the window to him, and he sprung to his feet with an oath.

"Look!" he cried, seizing Prince by the arm, "look quick! I want you to know that boy the next time you see him."

Prince looked, and saw Max quite plainly as he stood, laughing heartily at the retreating train.

"I believe you are out of your head," was his comment to Kilian Graff as he turned back into the car. "What is the matter with the boy?"

"He knows too much for me to let him run wild," said Graff savagely, "and I want you to find it out for me, will you?"

"Easier said than done, Kil," returned Prince. "Who is he?"

"His name is Merry, and he is or was a messenger-boy in Brooklyn."

"Well, where does he live?"

"I don't know. You must find that out."

"What do you want me to do when I do find out? Come, explain yourself, because I am not going to ask any more questions."

"I want you to either coax him, drive him or drag him to some place where I can lock him up and keep him on bread and water until he answers certain questions. The old man's dead, you know, Prince, and he left the bulk of his property to a certain Maxwell Merry under very peculiar conditions. That Maxwell Merry is either this boy's father or the boy himself,

and I begin to think the latter. At any rate, I want to find out, and if it is the boy, we'll just make him fork over a part of his pile. I'll let him know that when one deals against me, I'm only the more likely to win on the next."

"How in blazes did you manage to dash into the train and leave him on the platform?" asked Prince.

"I did not; there was no one on the platform when we boarded the cars. He must have seen me and jumped off after the train started."

Such was indeed, the fact. Max had gone to the front platform of the forward car and had seen Graff hurry on board the rear one just as they began to move, though in fact, he had not noticed Prince at all.

Making up his mind instantly he had pulled the gate open, and crying out to the brakeman that he had forgotten something, he had leaped to the gangway of the Bridge before the man had time to interfere. Then he stood still, waiting to see if Graff would notice him, and when he did, Max could not resist the temptation of blowing a kiss from his fingers toward the moving train.

"Where shall I go now?" he asked himself. "That fellow proposes to make it rather warm for me, I imagine, and I've got to change my clothes, that's certain."

He turned and left the Bridge, making his way through the narrow streets leading toward Roosevelt Street Ferry.

Meanwhile Graff and his friend Prince Charley had reached the Brooklyn side of the river, debarked from the Bridge-train, and were soon standing over a neighboring bar laying their plans for the capture of Max.

Graff had said enough to excite the cupidity of Prince, for that individual was "always on the lookout for 'shekels,'" as he elegantly expressed it.

Graff had proposed waiting and watching a few trains come over, in the hope that Max would be among the passengers, but Prince had scoffed at the idea.

"That boy is smart," he said. "Do you suppose he would walk right over here into your claws after taking all the trouble he has to get out of them? Besides, we don't want him now. I think I know a trick worth two of that, but I want to find out where he lives."

"Very well," said Graff. "We will go to the main office of the District Telegraph Company and ask the manager. He will probably know, or will find out for us if we tell him a straight yarn."

"Right! Come on, and before morning, I'll have the youngster in my little particular den where I lay by and muse when the community gets too warm for me. He can't get out of there, you can be certain, unless you or I let him out. It is a favorite little nest of mine where nobody but myself ever goes, and where I have got things fixed very comfortable and nice. Just now, there is a little company there—friends of mine who wanted to keep out of sight for a day or two—but they had to get in the same way you will, Kil—blindfolded, for I wouldn't let my own brother know to find me there. Once we get his nibs in that spot, we'll have him where he can't wriggle till he pays for the pleasure of it. Right!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE GAMIN—A HEAVY STAKE.

As Judge Curtis was leaving his residence on Montague street shortly after eight o'clock the morning following, he was accosted by the familiar cry of:

"Shine! Shine 'em up 's bright 's a dollar fur a nickel."

He shook his head and walked rapidly on, for his boots did not need shining—they never did, apparently, being nearly always capable of reflecting the brightest kind of a dollar, and particularly so on that morning.

But the knight of the box was not to be bluffed off, and either could not or would not notice how brightly the judge's boots already shone, and he followed on persistently for nearly a block, constantly repeating his monotonous "Shine, boss? Only a nickel—shine?"

At last the judge became out of patience and paused abruptly.

"Boy," he said, sharply, "I do not want a shine, as you can see, but if you will stop your clatter I will give you a nickel."

"Thanky, boss," said the boy, "but I'd ruther earn it; better let me shine 'em up; that shine's no good! De covey w'ot done it ain't got his trade learned, he ain't."

"Well, it is good enough for me," said the judge, with a frown, and tossing the bootblack

a nickel he turned and was about to continue his way toward his office when another voice accosted him.

"Judge," it said.

The gentleman turned sharply and looked all around, but no one was near except the bootblack, who was very busily engaged in studying the motto on his five-cent piece.

"Strange," muttered the judge, "I thought some one called me, and I thought the voice was that of young Merry, but I must have imagined it."

He turned again to pursue his way, but again was brought to a sudden halt by the same voice uttering the same word.

The bootblack was still studying the nickel as intently as though he had forgotten everything but that he possessed it.

"Boy," said the judge, in his most authoritative tone, "come here."

The bootblack raised his head and went toward the judge slowly.

"Did you speak to me just now?" questioned the man of law.

"Ye-up," replied the boy. "I axed ye if yer wanted er shine, an' ye said naw, ye didn't. Had ye forgot it already?"

"Did you call me judge, when I turned away?"

"I did, judge, surely. Don't you know me?"

"Well—well—well!!!" exclaimed Judge Curtis. "Maxwell, you surprise me! Know you? Not at all! You are completely disguised. I doubt if your own mother would know you. Even now that I know it is you, I find it hard to trace any resemblance to Maxwell Merry."

And well he might, for a tight-fitting wig of bright red had been placed over the dark curly hair which grew on Max's head, and his face and hands were so disfigured by streaks of blacking that even the shape of his features seemed changed. A ragged pair of pants much too large for their wearer were held in their place by means of one suspender strap which went over a very dirty shirt. His feet were incased in shoes which might have fitted the judge's feet with ease. He looked a veritable gamin, evidently much to the judge's astonishment.

"Walk on your boots," said Max, hastily; "spoil your shine somewhere, for I want you to take me into your office without my being recognized."

The judge took in the situation instantly, and with each boot spoiled the gloss on the other, and then telling Max to follow, led the way toward his office.

When they reached the office, a gentleman was waiting to see the judge, and rose as he entered.

"I will see you in a moment," said he; "just as soon as this boy shines my boots for me."

"But I merely want to ask one question."

"Well, what is it?"

"Can you tell me where I can find a young man by the name of Maxwell Merry? I have been to his house three times—twice last evening and again this morning—but he had not been there since yesterday morning."

Both Max and the judge started when the question was asked, but if the stranger noticed it he made no sign.

"I know such a boy," said Judge Curtis, slowly, "but as to where he can be found—um! perhaps he has gone fishing, if he isn't at the messenger-office where he works."

"He does not work there now," continued the stranger.

"Ah! in that case I should presume his home to be the most likely place to look for him."

"Perhaps so—thanks," and the stranger was about to depart.

"Stay," said the judge, carelessly. "If you are anxious to see him and will leave your name and address, I will see that he is possessed of it at the earliest opportunity."

"Thanks," returned the stranger. "If you will ask him to meet me this evening at seven in the Astor House rotunda, I will be there. I know him by sight, so he will only have to go there and wait until I speak to him. My name is Earl. Good-morning," and he vanished through the door.

"Come in, boy," said the judge, and in a moment more he and Max were alone in the private office.

"Do you know him?" asked Judge Curtis.

"No, sir; never saw him before, but I think I know what he is after."

"What?"

"Me."

"Why, yes, of course, since he asked for you," laughed the lawyer.

Then Max, in as few words as possible, related to Judge Curtis all that had happened the day previous, omitting nothing, and concluding with the remark:

"I have no doubt but that this is some friend of Graff's, and that he is seeking to get me into his clutches again. Judge, I think I will go to the Astor House to-night, and meet him."

"Not alone?"

"Yes, alone. I might as well remain away as to have company. While I somehow do not think that the nephew committed either the robbery or the shooting of Mr. Mordaunt, I do believe that he either knows who did, or that by following him I will be brought into contact with the criminals. He may know them without knowing their movements. At any rate, I have got the bee in my hat, and I'm going to let it buzz for awhile. I shall not go in my proper person, but in this rig, and when that fellow gets tired of waiting, I'll follow and see where he goes to. Ten to one, he'll take me direct to Kilian Graff."

"It is just seven o'clock," murmured Max, as in the guise of the red-headed bootblack, he entered the Astor House that evening.

There are always a multitude of men hanging about the place—sporting characters, and gentlemen using it as a place of meeting—and as Max entered, he had no difficulty in finding the man he was looking for, who was none other than Prince Charley.

"Shine?" said he, going up to him.

"Yes; fire away," and then, as Max was beginning operations: "Do you know any of the District Telegraph boys, sonny?"

"Ye-up."

"In Brooklyn?"

"Ye-up; belong dere."

"Do you know Maxwell Merry?"

"Ye-up."

"You're just the lad I'm looking for. If you will find him and bring him to me to-night I'll give you ten dollars."

"W'ot d'ye want 'im fur?"

"That is my business."

"Sure, boss; but I can't drag 'im by de hair, kin I?"

"No—you will give him a message for me."

"W'ot one?"

"This; tell him that Mr. Earl possesses some information which it will be greatly to his advantage for him to know. I am going away to-morrow, and he will have to see me between now and to-morrow morning, if at all. Here is a dollar, and I'll give you the other nine when you have done the job, or I'll give it to young Merry for you."

"Where shall I take him?"

"In front of this hotel. I will be on the steps outside."

"All right, boss. I'll hev him there, sure pop," and without another word Max turned and started away, Prince saying hastily that he would wait.

Max had determined upon a rash act; he had made up his mind that he would appear in his own person and hear what Mr. Earl wished to communicate, the publicity of the place of meeting, together with the early hour when it would take place arguing that he would be in little or no danger if it should be a plot to recapture him.

But he did not know the cunning and tenacity of the man, Prince, or he would have hesitated.

The trap was well-laid, and Max was preparing to walk into it, sharp and bright as he was—but it would spring upon him, nevertheless, with a snap so sudden and sharp that he would have no chance to fight or cry out.

CHAPTER X.

THE INTERVIEW—RUSHING INTO DANGER.

MAXWELL MERRY certainly possessed remarkable courage for a lad of his age. He never paused to count the dangers of an undertaking where he considered that the thing to be done was his duty, and as he made his way back toward the Astor House, after having changed his clothes so that he was once more Max, the messenger boy, his whole mind was upon what he might discover in the interview which he was to have with the stranger.

He had no doubt that a plot had been laid to recapture him, by Kilian Graff, but he felt that inasmuch as he was on the lookout for it, he could keep himself out of danger.

Their meeting was to be on the steps of the Astor House, and he smiled at the idea of being abducted from there.

It was nearly half-past nine when he presented himself at the door, and he at once saw the

man who called himself Earl leaning against the door-frame, smoking, but he made no sign, as he was not supposed to know the one who wished to see him.

Prince saw Max at the same time, and went hastily toward him.

"Are you Maxwell Merry?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Max. "I was told that you wished to see me, so I am here. What is it you want of me?"

"Let us step to one side where we can talk better," said Prince.

"Oh, no, that is unnecessary; we can talk well enough here."

"Very well. You are in search of the men who robbed Mr. Mordaunt, some few nights ago—"

"Am I?" asked Max, innocently, but Prince did not notice the interjection, and continued:

"—And you have been pursuing a man named Graff, who is the nephew of the dead man."

"Thanks, awfully! But I knew all that before. You seem to be pretty well posted, mister."

"Yes; I received my information partly from Graff, and manufactured the rest out of some from another quarter," went on Prince, coolly. "Now, what I want to know is, are you very anxious to find the men you are after?"

"Say," said Max, sharply; "I don't know what you are driving at. If you have got anything to tell me that I can understand, please say so."

"See if you can comprehend this, then: If there is any possibility of your making it worth my while, I can show you how you can put your paws onto the men you are after, inside of an hour."

Max might naturally be expected to have felt greatly elated upon receiving such information, but if he was, he did not show it in the least.

"Oh, I see," he said; "it is a stake you are after. You belong to that class which barter in the blood and liberty of their friends."

Prince ground his teeth together in ill-suppressed anger at that cool daring of the lad, and inwardly resolved that when the time came he would have a personal score to settle with him as well as with his friend Graff.

"Enough of this," he said, gruffly. "I am told that you have some money which you are willing to spend in apprehending these men. Now I can tell you where you can put your paws onto them with very little trouble, provided you see that I am well paid for it."

His manner was so earnest, and his talk was that of such a thorough-going scoundrel, that Max was more than half-deceived, and began to think that the stranger knew what he was talking about. At any rate, he concluded to look a little deeper into the matter before dropping it entirely.

"How much do you want?" he asked.

"Not much; say a thousand cases."

"When do you want it?"

"I'll take five hundred to-night, and five hundred more when the job's done."

"No, you don't," said Max, sharply. "You can't make five hundred out of me so easily."

"Well, a hundred now, then."

"No, sir! Nothing now; but deliver those men over to the police, and I will see that you get the thousand dollars, and if they are convicted you will get more."

Prince Charley appeared to be thinking deeply for several moments.

Suddenly he looked up and said:

"Say, young fellow, your 'prop.' suits me all right, but you see I ain't the only one concerned in it; there is another one with whom I have got to divide, and he's really the boss of this job. As far as I am concerned your suggestion is perfectly satisfactory, but he might kick—what then?"

"Let him kick, if it'll make him feel better. It's that or nothing. I won't consent to any other arrangement."

"That's just it, see? Now I'll tell you what we'll do; we'll jump into that cab yonder, and go and see this friend of mine and talk the matter over with him. He will consent to your plan when he sees that you are determined, and we can fix the whole thing up for letting the cops in on them, see?" and without waiting for a reply from Max, he signaled to the cab and walked across the pavement to where it drew up alongside of the curb.

But Max remained perfectly quiet where he had been standing, and Prince, who had opened the door of the cab, looked around and saw that the lad had not followed him.

"Sharp as a steel-trap!" he muttered, as he recrossed the pavement to Max's side.

"Well," he said, "are you coming?"

"I guess not, now," returned Max. "You take too much for granted."

"How so?"

"You don't stop to ask a fellow if his engagements will permit him to accompany you, and you see, unfortunately, mine don't."

"Then we'll have to drop the whole thing, that's all," said Prince, savagely.

"I'm sorry, but I guess that's true," returned Max, unmoved.

"Why don't you go with me and let your engagement wait?"

"Can't."

"Well, what will you do? Will you come back here a little later and go with me?"

"Don't know; that depends. I might get back here in an hour, or even less."

"Well, do that, and I'll have my friend here, so that you won't have to go to him."

"All right," said Max; "it's a go."

Without another word he turned and re-entered the Astor House rotunda, and darting up the stairs as quickly as he could, in a moment more he issued from the building at the Vesey street entrance, and hurrying down that thoroughfare a little way, crossed it and sauntered back slowly on the other side.

Reaching the corner, he paused for a moment in the shadow of a friendly peanut stand, where he could see the spot where he had stood with Prince but a moment before.

"I didn't make any mistake," he muttered, as he saw the black-mustached man issue from the rotunda entrance. "He's been trying to find out where I went to."

Prince glanced around him quickly and nervously, and then sauntered up to the cab he had previously called, and stood there several moments as if reflecting.

"That's very nicely done," muttered the boy, "but I'll bet sixpence that his 'friend' is no other than Kilian Graff, and that he is inside that coupe this minute."

In a moment more he saw Prince say something to the driver, and then he entered the cab, and it drove up Broadway.

"They'll be back here in an hour," thought Max, "and in the mean time I might as well change my clothes."

Waiting a moment longer until the cab was well on its way up the street, the gallant young fellow started off on a run, and ere long was leaning over the counter in the office of the United States Hotel.

"I'll take that satchel I left here a little while ago, if you please," he said to the clerk, who received his check and handed him a little bag.

Taking it, with a word or two of thanks, he went out and down toward the river, making his way slowly out on one of the piers, to where bale upon bale of cotton was piled in great confusion.

It did not take him long to select a sheltered spot, where he began divesting himself of his garments.

In fifteen minutes he was again the bootblack, with his face and hands dirtier than ever.

Then hurrying back to South street he quickly found an always-open baggage-express office.

"A young feller wanted me to leave this 'ere grip fur you ter send ter Churchtown," he said to the man in the little coop.

"All right," said the man; "pay in advance."

"Cert. Gi' me der change outen that, 'cos de man said it was for me," and he passed over a dollar, receiving his fifty cents in change, and insisting upon a receipt "to prove that he was O. K.," he said, "in case somebody else gobbled de grip."

"There!" thought Max, as he started slowly up Fulton street. "I don't believe that fellow will know me now from Adam. He may recognize me as the one who shined him up and then did an errand for him, but I don't care if he does."

The street was nearly deserted, as compared with its condition when he had left it an hour before, but a cab was standing before the rotunda entrance of the Astor House, and on the steps, a few feet away, stood Prince.

"Shine!" he shouted, hurrying toward the motionless figure. "Shine 'em up, boss! Only a— Hullo! You's de man w'ot got me ter do a job fur ye, an' ain't paid me yet. Say, didn't young Merry come here?"

"Yes, he came."

"Well, ye didn't give him de balance due me, as yo said he would, 'cos I see'd him a few minutes ago, an' he said so."

"Did you ask him for it?"

"Course I did."

"And he said he did not have it?"

"Dat's w'ot he said, boss."

"Well, he lied, for I gave it to him for you."

"He said ye didn't."

"I did; he has probably swiped it, sonny."

"By thunder!" exclaimed the bootblack, "if I thought that, I'd git even wid 'im, ef it took me a lifetime."

"It's true, so you can begin getting even right away. Where was he when you saw him?"

"Down at the ferry, waitin' fur a boat. He said you was no good, an' that he'd stood you up on de Astor House steps, an' he was goin' home an' goin' ter bed. I saw him git onter de boat."

"How long ago was that?"

"Jest now; I kin right up here fur dem nine cases. He said I'd find ye here."

"Confound him!" muttered Prince, between his teeth.

Suddenly a bright thought struck him.

"Here, sonny," he said, "you shall be paid for your trouble, anyway. Here are five dollars. Now answer a few questions."

"Fire away, boss."

"What is your name?"

"Pete."

"Pete what?"

"Don't know."

"How long have you been a bootblack?"

"Don't know; might'a' been born wid a brush in me hand."

"You say that you want to get even with Merry; do you mean it?"

"You bet I do!"

"Well, so do I."

"You! w'ot fur?"

"That is my business."

"Sure! Shine's done, boss. Good-night."

"Hold on! wait a moment! I want you to do another job for me."

"W'ot one?"

"I want you to bring young Merry where I can get my hands on him. Can you do it?"

"I kin."

"Will you?"

"I will."

"When?"

"Any time after to-night."

"To-morrow night?"

"Ye-up."

"Good! To-morrow night at ten o'clock have him at the corner of Beekman and Pearl streets, and I'll give you two more Vs."

"It's a bargain, boss."

Prince turned and sprung into the cab, which speedily started away, but all unknown to the driver or the schemers inside it carried an extra passenger.

Clinging fast to the running gear, with his legs wound tightly around the springs, rode Max in his disguise of Pete, the bootblack, and he had resolved to follow the person who was so interested in his capture until he ran him to earth.

He could not help thinking that the man we knew as Prince was in some way connected with the robbery and murder of Mr. Mordaunt, while, if there was any truth in his assertion that he could deliver up the culprits, Max proposed to find it out.

Unknowingly, however, he was rushing headlong into great danger.

CHAPTER XI.

A DARING AND DANGEROUS DEED.

"I'm going to see where that fellow hangs out, if it takes me a week," said Max, to himself, as he clung to the running-gear of the cab as it bowled rapidly up Broadway.

The time was close upon midnight, and the busy thoroughfare, usually so thronged with people and vehicles of all descriptions, was almost deserted.

Now and then an officer could be seen holding up the lamp-post of some convenient corner, and occasionally a belated clerk or one of the regular night-owl class would saunter up or down the street, but that was all.

Presently the cab made a sharp turn, and then another and still another, but Max was so situated that he could not determine what streets they were passing through.

Suddenly they came to a stop and Max could hear the passengers descending from the vehicle, but still he clung fast, knowing that to be discovered would spoil all his plans.

There was a moment's parley over the driver's pay, and then the two plotters—for it was Kilian Graff who was with Prince Charlie—started leisurely down the street toward the river, while the cab rolled rapidly away.

"That's rather curious," commented the boy detective, "leaving them right in the middle of a dark street."

He held on for a few moments, until he felt sure that he could drop from his perch unobserved, and then, at the risk of receiving severe bruises and broken bones, let go his hold, and landed in a heap upon the rough pavement.

Quickly springing to his feet, unhurt except for a severe shaking-up, he looked hastily in the direction taken by Graff and his friend.

There was no one in sight.

With an exclamation of dismay, he was about to start onward at a run, when he saw the two men issue from the shadow of a dark doorway, and once more turn their footsteps toward the river.

"I wonder if they got onto me," thought the boy, but he never once thought of hesitating or turning back.

The fact was, although of course Max had no way of knowing it, that Prince had blindfolded his friend while in the carriage, and had halted in the doorway for two reasons. One was to assure himself that Graff could not see through the bandage over his eyes, and the other was to satisfy himself that they were not being followed, or even too closely observed by any one, and having found everything satisfactory, they had started on again; for although Prince was keen-eyed, he had never thought of looking under the rapidly-moving cab for an animated bundle of rags.

Max noticed, as he flitted from shadow to shadow, now behind a box, now under a deserted dray, and again in a dark doorway on the opposite side of the street, that Prince appeared to be leading Graff, whose hat was pulled down over his eyes, and who looked and acted as though he were intoxicated.

In fact, that was the conclusion at which the young detective arrived, as he flittered along after them as noiselessly as the shadow he was endeavoring to emulate.

Presently West street was reached, and then they approached the Christopher Street Ferry, which runs to Hoboken.

"Here's a fix," thought Max. "If they should choose to stop on this end of the boat, that fellow who calls himself Earl will be sure to spot me if go on."

Nevertheless, he followed them through the ferry-house, ascertaining that the boat would start in just seven minutes, as he did so, and then he hurried out upon the bridge just in time to see that the two men were passing through the center of the boat toward the forward end, thus avoiding the lighted cabins.

"They'll stand there in the dark until the boat lands on the other side, and then wait until the passengers get off before leaving themselves," thought the boy, "so I'll just work the other racket."

Accordingly, he passed boldly through the lighted cabin, never pausing until he was leaning against the iron gates at the forward end of the boat, and there he remained until it entered the slip, bounding ashore as soon as the gates were thrown open.

Hurrying forward, he paused at a convenient point, in a deep shadow, where he could see Graff and Prince as they came off.

He had not long to wait, for passengers on the ferry-boats were few at that hour, and the two men wandered along behind those few.

"Where in the world are they going, and what are they up to, anyway?" wondered Max, as he once more took up the trail, following them out of the ferry-house and along the rather sparsely-lighted streets of Hoboken.

Instead of making his way toward the principal part of the city, Prince led his friend through numerous side streets, making many turns and twists which seemed to Max totally unnecessary.

"I've got it!" suddenly exclaimed the young detective, under his breath. "That black-mustached fellow is taking Graff somewhere, and has got him blindfolded while he plays drunk to hide the fact, and these turns and twists are to mislead him entirely. Go it, old fellow! you won't lose me—not if I know it!"

Suddenly, and just as Max had arrived at the above conclusion, they issued from a narrow street upon a long wharf, on the river, and there the two paused.

While Max was wondering what the next move would be, Prince suddenly loosed his hold upon his companion's arm, and started at a rapid pace back through the narrow street, directly toward the spot where the boy was standing.

For an instant he did not know what to do. Could it be that the man suspected that he

was being followed, and was coming back to settle summarily with the foolhardy shadow?

No—that could not be the case, for if it were, Prince would have made his retrograde movement in a very different manner.

In any case, Max had but a moment in which to think, and he knew he must get out of the way somehow.

He dared not run back over the ground he had come, for Prince would surely either see or hear him, and even if he did not, the boy might lose sight of them entirely.

Almost at his elbow was a hogshead, partly filled with scraps of iron and old junk, and without an instant's hesitation, Max gave one spring and landed fairly inside, with scarcely any noise.

There was just room enough for him to curl up inside, below the open top of the hogshead, and a moment's time in which to pull a coil of old and rotten rope over his head and shoulders, when he heard Prince's footsteps as he made his way cautiously but rapidly along.

Every few paces he would pause, as if listening, and once he crossed the street to the other side, but came back again almost immediately.

Suddenly he paused right beside the hogshead in which Max lay concealed, and the boy's heart almost stood still.

He knew that if the desperate man should find him there and recognize him, his life would not be worth a moment's purchase in that silent, deserted street on the Hoboken water-front.

He felt that the man took hold of the huge affair and tried to move it, and heard him mutter:

"Old junk and scrap-iron!"

Then he could hear him breathe, as he leaned over a little as if peering in to see that nobody was concealed there.

But the rope covered Max better than he thought it did, or else the place was so dark that Prince could not have seen him anyway, for the momentary inspection seemed to satisfy him and he moved onward up the street.

As his footsteps died away, Max raised his head just enough so that he could peer over the top of the huge barrel, and he saw the shadowy outline of Prince's figure some distance back in the street.

Then he watched him cross the street and make his way as cautiously and systematically back toward the river on the other side.

"Well, I'm blessed if he ain't the most careful crook I ever heard of!" mused the boy. "A big fellow would have had no show following him to-night, that's certain."

He sprung lightly from the hogshead as Prince rejoined his friend and hurried on after them as they turned down the wharf toward the lower end, keeping well in the shadow of the buildings as he did so.

A couple of hundred feet more were traversed, when they came to a halt again, and Max saw them speaking earnestly together for a moment.

Then Graff was led backward to a pile of planking and was seated upon them, while Prince went forward to the edge of the wharf, and bending far over appeared as though hauling upon a rope.

Nor was Max mistaken in the conjecture, for presently a boat appeared from underneath and was firmly tied alongside.

"I'm left, sure!" muttered the boy, in deep chagrin. "They're going to take to the water, and I can't follow them. Hullo! what's up now?"

The last exclamation was caused by his seeing Prince, after making the boat fast, hurry rapidly away toward the end of the pier.

Then it was that the gallant young detective formed a sudden and desperate resolution.

"Now or never!" he exclaimed, under his breath, as he made a rapid dart forward. "That fellow's back is turned and Graff is blindfolded, so maybe I can make it work."

He had seen that the boat was a large one, having evidently once been a sail-boat, having each end decked over so as to provide lockers (or cupboards) underneath.

"If the things are unlocked, and are big enough, and ain't full already," he thought, rapidly, "I can get in. Anyway, I'll try it on, and if it don't fit, I'll just drop overboard and swim under the pier till they get away."

It was a daring and hazardous thing for him to do, but he did not stop to count the cost.

He reached the boat unobserved and dropped into it, at once trying the locker nearest him.

It was fastened, and with an exclamation of impatience he hurried to the other one.

That was open, and, as luck would have it, empty.

Turning feet first, he began crowding himself into the small space.

It was a tight squeeze, and his position was necessarily terribly cramped, but he finally succeeded in getting his body entirely in, and pulled the little door shut just as Prince appeared upon the edge of the wharf with a pair of oars over his shoulder.

Then Max realized the danger he was in.

CHAPTER XII.

FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH.

THE single hair which suspended the sword over the head of Damocles was not more frail and uncertain than the little canvas door which stood between our hero, Max, and death.

He realized it fully while Prince was helping Kilian Graff into the boat. He knew that a man who would take so many precautions to keep a secret inviolate from a friend and everyday companion, would not hesitate to kill a stranger who might have discovered, or be about to discover, the one thing that he wished to keep so entirely to himself.

In a few moments both men were in the boat, Prince taking the oars, while Graff was seated, still blindfolded, upon the stern seat, over the locker that Max had first tried.

He was glad now that the other place had been locked, else he would have been directly under Mr. Mordaunt's nephew.

"I say, Prince," said Graff, after a moment or two of dead silence, "how much longer is this thing going to last, eh? You tied that cursed bandage so tight that my eyes are 'way in the back of my head now."

"We are almost there now," returned Prince.

"So!" thought Max, "he isn't an earl, he's a prince."

"Where is this den of yours, anyway? In the middle of the Atlantic Ocean?"

"Not quite; we're almost there now."

Another silence for a moment or two, and then Graff spoke again.

"Do you think the boy, Pete, will keep his agreement and bring young Merry to-morrow night?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so. He's pretty mad about those nine dollars which he thought I was fool enough to give to Merry, and those youngsters don't have much conscience when they get mad. He'll bring him if he can."

"What is your plan for coppering him?"

"Why, when he gets near enough, I'm just going to haul off and give him one straight from the shoulder, and then we can pick him up and put him in the cab at our leisure. See?"

"What do you think of him, Prince?"

"I think he's a young devil, and just about as smart as they're made."

"Thanks," thought Max, in the locker.

"Tell me just how you're going to make a pile out of him, will you?" continued Prince.

"Why, don't you see? The old man took a fancy to him some time ago—found out that he was smart, I suppose, and after he was shot that day, he lived long enough to make a will in which he gave nearly all his property to Judge Curtis in trust for this boy."

"Well, the boy is to hunt down the fellows who robbed the old man of the forty-five, and bring them to limbo. See?"

"Yes, I see. Now, how are we going to make the boy fork over? That's what puzzles me."

"Why, easy enough. Don't you see that the money is all his, and only in the hands of Curtis as trustee? Young Merry has only to write a letter to the judge, which we can get young Pete to deliver, if he proves trustworthy, in which he will say that he has been made prisoner by the very people he is hunting after, and they demand a ransom."

"Suppose Curtis won't pay it?"

"He'll be obliged to, if the boy demands it. He may kick, but that won't make any difference, for we can wait till he gets tired of that and comes down to business."

"Suppose the boy won't write the letter—what then?"

"We'll make him."

"But suppose he won't?"

"He'll have to, or be food for fishes."

Another expressive silence, finally broken by Prince.

"Graff," he said, "who got the forty-five of the old man?"

"I don't know; wish I did."

"Who killed him, eh?"

"Don't know that, either," sullenly.

"Did you?"

"You know I didn't! what's the use of asking such questions?"

"Because I think you know who did."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"Well, I don't. I wouldn't deny it to you if I did."

"I think you would, Kil."

"Well, drop it! You have a right to your ideas as well as anybody else, I suppose, and whether they're right or wrong is your affair—not mine. Who are these fellows now in your nest?"

"Two friends of mine."

"Laying by for a squall?"

"Exactly—a pretty big one, too; liable to wreck 'em if they should be caught out in it."

"You must think a lot of them to take them to your nest."

"I don't, but I'm very fond of their boodle, and they've got lots of it."

"So they're paying you for the privilege?"

"Well, rather! I haven't turned philanthropist just yet. I've always been able to take care of myself, and several times I have protected others as well, but they always have to pay for it—and they know it."

"That's all very well, Prince, but some fine day you'll be cornered, and then the boys'll turn on you, and if you're not flush it'll go hard with you."

"That's all right, Kill. I'll take my chances, just the same. There isn't a detective in New York who hasn't tried to shadow me sooner or later, and none of them ever made it out yet."

"Why not?"

"Well, because I always got onto them, and either threw them off the scent, or walked right up to the party, whoever he was, and told him that if he wanted to follow me, he had better go home and change his clothes, because I knew him in the rig he had on, see? I never was puzzled but once."

"How was that?"

"A young fellow from Boston got after me. I was suspected of complicity in a bank affair, though the fact is I had nothing whatever to do with it, except that one of the fellows who had was rusticking in my nest."

"Well, that young fellow got after me, and I tried three or four times to throw him off the scent, but he always bobbed up serenely, so one night I walked up to him and told him it was no use dogging me any further."

"He laughed and said that he had about come to that conclusion himself and invited me in to Nash and Crook's for a hooker."

"We parted there, and he was playing billiards when I left him, so I skipped across the city at a lively rate, taking every precaution that I knew how. I got over the ferry all right, and worked my way through the streets where I brought you to-night without seeing a soul, and after looking behind me and taking every care to see that I was not followed or watched, I pulled this boat out from under the pier—I kept it in a different place then—and may I be pulverized if that fellow wasn't sitting on one of the seats, smoking a cigar as comfortable as could be."

"How he got there before I did, or knew how to get there, I don't know. He had the drop on me, of course, and I could not wriggle, only I refused to go any further."

"Well, he made a proposition to me that I had to accept. He said he knew that I was not concerned in the robbery, but that he was satisfied I had got some of the swag and perhaps one of the fellows he was after in my care."

"Well, the whole long and short of it is, that I had to give up the swag and the poor fellow to boot in order to live in peace, myself."

"Do you mean to say that you gave your friend up?"

"Well, not exactly. I had agreed to have him at a certain spot at a certain time, and I got there with him a few minutes before. Then I kept my eyes peeled, and when I saw the fellows coming to capture their goose I just said to him:

"When you expect it least you are in the most danger. Don't ask any questions, but just knock me down and run for it."

"Did he?"

"Well, didn't he? He knocked me senseless at one clip. Hit me hard enough so that my story went all right, and besides I had a good part of the swag for them, as I had agreed. They captured him afterward, but that wasn't my fault."

"Here we are. Slide down into the bottom of the boat, and duck your head if you don't want to see stars blindfolded."

Max could hear the oars brought into the boat, and in a moment more, a grating sound told him that they were sliding under a wharf.

"Now pull off your bandage, Kil," he heard Prince say. "You're welcome to see all you

can now. Sit still while I make the boat fast."

Max calculated that the boat had been crowded fully fifty feet under the wharf before he felt that she was made fast, and Prince said to his companion:

"Come on, old man."

Then he heard a noise like the striking of a match, and presently felt that the two men had left the boat.

Pushing the door of the locker open ever so little, he protruded his head, and could just see, by the glimmer of light evidently made by a dark-lantern, that the two men were making their way on foot under the wharf.

"Be careful where you step or you'll get a ducking," he heard Prince say, and then he crawled slowly from his hiding-place, and started after them, first pausing to remove the big shoes from his feet.

He presently found himself on a narrow plank, and it was so dark that he was obliged to resort to his hands and knees as a mode of travel, for fear of making a misstep.

The others, being in an upright position, of course got along faster, and were soon out of sight and hearing entirely.

Max made his way steadily forward, however, wondering if he would lose the trail after all, but never once dreaming of giving up the chase.

He had gone forward two or three hundred feet, when suddenly he felt the plank beneath him tremble with something beside his own weight.

Then there came a flash of light, as if from a bull's-eye lantern, just ahead, but it was evidently not aimed at him, for he remained undiscovered.

But while he was congratulating himself for the narrow escape, he again felt the plank tremble, and he knew that whoever was on the narrow pathway was crawling directly toward him, and that if he moved he would surely be discovered.

What to do, he did not know.

There they were, face to face, and only a few feet distant from each other, but the darkness was so intense that neither of them could see a thing.

Max felt that his presence was not suspected, but he also realized that in another moment he would be discovered, while at any instant his unwelcome companion might draw the slide of his lantern, and thus reveal him, an easy mark for a bullet.

Nearer and nearer came the man with the dark-lantern, until the young detective could hear him breathe.

In another moment they would be together inevitably, it seemed, and the boy's heart beat fast, as he grasped the only weapon he had—a little revolver—and waited for that moment to come.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE NEST—A SURPRISE.

We left brave Max Merry in a very unenviable position—upon his hands and knees on a narrow plank underneath a wharf—he knew not where; and within a few feet of him, and every instant coming nearer—although it was so dark that they could not see each other—was a man who he knew would kill him the moment he should discover his presence.

What to do to escape the consequences of that visit the boy did not know.

Suddenly, when they were but a few feet apart, the man stopped, and for a moment Max almost ceased to breathe, fearing that he had in some unknown manner betrayed himself.

"I guess I've gone too far," he heard a voice mutter, which he instantly recognized as belonging to Prince, and then he arose to an upright position and moved the slide of his lantern.

Luckily, however, he had turned around before doing so, which made the light shine away from Max.

Then Prince, walking cautiously, went back a little way.

"No," he muttered, "I was right, or nearly so; it is the plank I am on. Yes, there is the peg."

He took a few more steps and then stooped over, using his light as if in search of something.

That he found it soon became evident to Max, for in an instant more the plank gave way beneath him, and they both fell with a loud splash into the water below.

The fall was six or eight feet to the water, and as the plank gave way at both ends at the same time, it was naturally both sudden and surprising; but the very suddenness of it prob-

ably saved the boy from discovery, for the cry which he would have given was stifled and choked into nothing by the water and the noise made by the falling timber.

Max was thrown off into the water, but he clung with one hand to the plank as he allowed himself to sink out of sight beneath the surface, for after the first brief instant his presence of mind returned to him and he knew that the slightest sound other than natural noises would betray him.

The light flashed along the plank for one brief moment and then vanished, and Max could hear Prince as he strode away.

"Well, I've got a ducking, anyway," he muttered. "The next thing is to get out of here and see where that fellow goes. Judging from what I have heard to-night, the police would rather like to know where he hangs out, even if this expedition doesn't put me on the track of the men I am after."

He made his way through the water by keeping his hand on the plank, toward the side where Prince had disappeared, and soon found that he could clamber up with little difficulty to one so agile as himself.

Dripping with the cold water into which he had so unexpectedly been plunged, he soon raised himself upon the solid plank and began to creep cautiously forward again.

"I wonder how far this thing goes, anyway," he muttered; "there must be an end to it before long."

Even as he spoke he found it, and very unexpectedly, too, for he butted his head sharply against something solid. So solid, that for a moment he was dazed.

The plank ended there, for he could feel where a cleat had been nailed on the side of a smooth surface for the purpose of supporting it.

"If I only had that dark-lantern for a moment," he thought.

Raising himself slowly upon his feet, he began to feel about him for something to direct his succeeding movements.

He soon found that by standing on tiptoe, he could just reach what seemed to be the top of the smooth wall.

"They must have something to help them climb up here," he mused. "Ah! here it is!"

His hand had come in contact with another cleat, which was evidently placed there to step upon in mounting to the top.

"I'm bound to try it, anyway," said Max between his teeth as he thought of the possibility of losing his hold and receiving another ducking in the water. "I can't get much wetter than I am now, that's certain."

Giving a little spring upward, he grasped the top of what seemed to be a wall, or bulkhead, and then sprung one foot up, until it rested upon the cleat.

Then, slowly raising himself, he worked his hands still further over, until he discovered that they were resting upon a sort of wooden rail, which was evidently laid along the top of the wall.

With one or two exertions he swung his leg over, and then cautiously drew up his body.

"This feels more like the deck of a boat than anything else," he thought when he had reached the top, and found himself upon what seemed to be smooth flooring. "Oh, for a light to burn just one moment!"

In his pocket he had a metallic match-safe, and the thought struck him that perhaps the water had not penetrated into it sufficiently to spoil the matches, and he quickly drew it out.

He knew that it was a reckless thing to do, to strike a match there, the flame of which might betray his presence to the men he had been following, but in a measure, he felt that it was fully as reckless to wander about the uncertain platform in the intense darkness, when the slightest false step might precipitate him headlong into some unseen abyss from which he might not be able to extricate himself.

Cautiously selecting one of the matches, he struck it, and much to his gratification, it burned brightly.

By the momentary light it gave, he saw that he was on the deck of a sunken canal-boat, which had probably been filled with rocks at the time the pier was built, and used as a part of the crib-foundation.

The darkness seemed greater than ever when the match went out, but its light had enabled him to see enough to satisfy him as to the surroundings, and he seated himself upon the deck of the old boat to think.

"Let me see," he mused; "this boat is not sunk deep enough to flood the floor of the cabin, and this man who calls himself Earl has pro-

bably fixed that place up for his 'nest,' as he terms it. Now if I can find the hatchway, there will perhaps be something open for ventilation through which I can hear what is going on below."

Max, having come to this conclusion, began creeping stealthily along the deck toward the stern of the sunken boat, feeling carefully in front of him at every move, in order that he might not strike unexpectedly against some obstruction, the noise of which would betray him; and in the course of time he reached a point where he could feel raised woodwork before him, and he knew at once that it was the roof of the cabin.

"I'll make a circuit of it," thought the brave boy, and he began cautiously to crawl around the raised portion.

He turned the first corner, and then came to a sudden pause, for before him, on the deck, he found a little glimmer of light.

It was not larger than the blade of a knife, but it proved conclusively that his conjecture had been correct, and that the men he was pursuing were in the cabin of the old boat. Nay, more; it proved that something was open, as he had suspected, and so after the first pause of indecision, he edged along toward the little shaft of escaping light.

The operation required three or four minutes, and then he found that an inside blind, made perfectly tight, had been raised about an inch, and while he could not see anything through the aperture, he could hear the murmur of voices talking together in the cabin below.

Stretching himself flat upon the deck, he applied his ear to the little opening, and instantly discovered that he could hear perfectly well.

Prince was speaking when he began to listen.

"Well, Kil, what do you think of it, now you are here?"

"I think it is very snug and safe," returned Graff, "only you are too infernally cautious about blindfolding a fellow when you bring him here."

"Not at all, my boy—that is what makes it so safe."

"Where is your company that you spoke of?"

"In the other end of the boat. I will let them know they are wanted, and introduce you."

"How? By going out into that beastly dark place again, and risking your neck?"

"Oh, no! By simply pulling that wire up there. See? This place has two exits; one at each end of the boat, while the two ends are connected inside by a plank-walk under the deck. See? The boat was once filled with stones—all of it except this cabin—and I have gradually cleaned out the stones from the forward cabin—where the mules were kept when the craft was in use—and fixed up a partition which makes it warm and comfortable. Along one side of the boat I have cleared away stones enough to make a passage from one cabin to the other, so that in case any one should succeed in following me here I could vacate this end, crawl through a port-hole in the other end onto a plank which leads off in another direction, at the end of which I would drop into the water, swim a little way, and crawl out at a point where they would not think of stationing a guard, and so escape."

"That wire communicates with a little bell in the other cabin, muffled so that it cannot be heard on the deck. Whenever I have company here they have to do their snoozing in the other cabin. If I want them here I pull the wire three times, then pause and pull it twice more. If there is danger here and I am going to them I pull it three times only and then start."

"Before I call them here I want to say this much. They have been engaged in a little affair over in Brooklyn, regarding which I find they have lied to me. Whatever you may hear in the conversation which takes place that surprises you, evince no surprise whatever, and we will talk it over together later. Now I'll pull the bell."

There followed a few moments of silence, and then Max heard Prince speak again.

"Ah, boys!" he said, "I have come to see how you are getting along, and I have brought a friend to whom I want to present you. This is Mr. Kilian Graff, of Brooklyn, nephew to a man who was recently murdered, a certain Mr. Mordaunt, of Remsen street."

"Murdered?" exclaimed a voice, which made Max start as though he had suddenly received an electric shock, for he recognized it instantly.

"Yes, Tom, murdered," went on Prince, calmly; "shot; and the night before he was robbed of forty-five thousand dollars in cash. Think of it—forty-five—and not ten, as we heard, eh?"

CHAPTER XIV.

A DESPERATE MAN—"WE'LL SEE, WE'LL SEE!"

"THERE must be some mistake," broke in a gruff voice, which Max also could have made oath he recognized; "the newspapers and the police always get such things too big. Now, I happen to know the fellows who did that job, and I know that ten thousand was all that they got, so our friend here must be misinformed."

"How is that, Kil?" asked Prince; "are you sure about the amount?"

"Dead sure."

"On the contrary, you are dead wrong," broke in the gruff voice again, and this time it was gruffer than before and trembled a little as if with anger.

"Did you see the money?" asked Graff, sarcastically.

"Yes, youngster, I saw it."

"Did you count it?"

"Yes, Johnny Fresh, I counted it."

"Ah! then perhaps you were one of the fellows who took it?"

"Yes, I was, if you're anxious to know. I took it myself while my friend here looked on, and if you have made Prince Charlie believe that there was more than ten in the boodle, you've either helped to spread a false report or you have lied."

With a loud oath Graff sprung to his feet, but the gruff voice again broke in, this time more quietly than before.

"Sit still, sonny!" it said; "I've got the drop on you, and I'd just as soon see you buried from this canal-boat as in a burying-ground. I don't know who you are, nor what you have got to do with the Prince here, but if you go to telling any more lies about me you'll get into trouble. You're young enough so that you haven't learned all the ropes yet. Now, Prince," and he evidently turned to that individual, "whom do you believe, this youngster or me?"

"Why," returned Prince, "I think there is a mistake somewhere. I'll admit that I thought you had deceived me, but if you stick to it, why, of course, it's all right. Naturally, I was interested, because by agreement a quarter of it came to me."

"Yes; when we get ready to move out, not before. Tom and I weren't such fools as to bring the boodle here; not quite. You're a pretty decent sort of fellow, when you can make a dollar by decency, so let's drop it. When we leave you'll get your quarter of ten thousand, no more, no less, but if you bring any more fresh young roosters like this fellow, who probably killed his uncle too late to get the boodle—"

"That's a lie!" cried Graff, but the big man continued without noticing the interruption:

"By thunder, we'll bolt! Is that so, Tom?"

"Certainly," broke in that strangely peculiar voice. "We have very serious reasons for not caring to meet anybody, and you, Prince, have broken your contract in bringing this young man here and allowing him to see us. We'll overlook it this time, but don't bring us any more strangers."

"No!" broke in the gruff voice, "don't you dare to do it, for as sure as you do, I'll kill you both; you and the one you bring."

"What!" cried Prince, leaping to his feet.

Then came a loud report in Max's ear, as he pressed it to the little opening. The report of a revolver, followed by a groan, and the sound of a body falling upon the floor.

"Don't you move, sonny, or I'll send you after him," exclaimed the gruff voice, in a rage, after the instant of silence following the report. "We're playing a desperate game, and the Prince, here, was getting dangerous. Tom, cover the youngster while I see to his majesty, the prince. Better still, I'll relieve him of his weapons first, if he's got any."

"There!" after a moment's silence. "You needn't look so scared. You've got to stay here till we let you go, but you won't be hurt unless you bring it on yourself. What shall we do with this, Tom?"

"Chuck him overboard from the plank walk at the forward end," suggested Tom, in rather a weak voice. "I'm sorry you did it, though."

"Had to, Tom. Don't you see that he believed the yarn this fool told him? and that after I threatened him, he would have gone and given us away? we can't afford to run any risks, now, my boy."

"Prince is dead," said Max to himself, with a shudder, "and killed by the very man who took Mr. Mordaunt's money. I wonder what they will do with Graff."

A moment more answered that question for him, for he heard the voice of Tom say:

"Graff, you have to go with us to the other end of the boat. There are some handcuffs

there tha' we can put on you, and we'll risk your trying to travel very far under this pier with them on your wrists. You, Drake, bring the prince, and presently, when we've fixed these two, we will come back here, and talk things over."

There was a moment or two of preparation, and then Max could hear them leave the cabin, after which a dead silence reigned.

What was the next move for him to make? He could not gain anything by listening further, and it seemed as though it was by far the best thing for him to do, to leave the place at once, notify the police, and have the nest raided before morning. On the other hand, he felt a great desire to hear what the two men in whom he was so deeply interested might have to say, when they talked "things over," as the big one had suggested. Something of importance might come to light, which he could learn in no other way, and he felt it to be highly important that he should listen to the coming conversation.

But how? By remaining where he was, with his ear close to the little aperture caused by the partly raised blind? Suppose they should shut it, as a means of greater caution! Then he would have "his trouble for his pains," and hear nothing.

He took hold of the blind and moved it a little, discovering that he could easily raise it to the full height of the little window.

Thrusting his head through the opening, he gazed about the little apartment.

There was nothing to attract the eye, except that it looked cozy and comfortable to the boy, shivering with the cold in his wet garments.

There were two bunks in the place, with a locker under a lower one, sufficiently large to have concealed a full-grown man.

As he looked at it, he took a sudden resolution—hazardous and dangerous, certainly, but the warm interior was the tempter, for his teeth were beginning to chatter so with the cold that he was afraid the noise might betray him; he resolved to drop inside through the open window, and to conceal himself in the locker where he could be much more comfortable, and at the same time would not miss a word that might be said in the talk between the two villains.

That certain and sure death, like that which had befallen the luckless Prince, would be his fate were he discovered, he knew, but he hardly gave it a thought as he let himself carefully down through the window, and stood for one brief instant in the center of the little cabin.

Then he made for the locker quickly. There was some bedding, a bundle or two of clothes, old shoes, pieces of rope, and what-not of all descriptions in the place, but he brushed them aside, and crawled in behind, making a pillow out of one of the bundles, and hastily pulling the bedding and debris generally over him, for the double purpose of keeping him warm, and of concealing him from observation should either of the two men, by chance, look in there.

He succeeded in making himself very comfortable, and long before the two burglars returned to the cabin he was warm and fast becoming drowsy.

Suddenly, and just as he was beginning to think that they had gone to bed at the other end of the boat, he heard the peculiar voice of Tom say:

"How did these wet marks come here? They were not here when we went out."

Max's heart almost stood still for an instant, and that simple question drove away his drowsiness effectually, for he knew that his dripping garments had left their mark upon the floor.

Did they leave a trail leading to the locker where he was concealed? he asked himself, and for the first time since he had begun his career as a detective, he felt a shudder of apprehension creep over him.

"Nonsense, Tom," was the gruff rejoinder, "they must have been there."

"But I say they weren't, and look, they lead to that locker."

"Bah! who could get in here? Trust the Prince for not allowing himself to be shadowed, but to satisfy you, Tom, I'll examine the locker. Prince probably got wet, and poked his duds in there, but we'll see—we'll see."

CHAPTER XV. THE UNKNOWN SCHEME—A CRITICAL SITUATION.

BRAVE Max felt, when he heard the heavy steps of the big man approaching the place where he was hidden, that his time had come. He did not doubt but that he would be discov-

ered and dragged forth to meet with abuse and curses, and finally death and a grave in the river, like the fate of Prince Charlie.

"Poor mother!" he muttered, his thoughts flying to her instantly; "she will never know what became of me. I was a fool to come in here when I had heard enough."

Meanwhile the big one had reached the locker and pulled the door open, and was beginning to rummage among the effects which Max had piled over him.

"I told you so," he heard him say, suddenly, "here is where the wet came from."

And he flung something out on the cabin-floor.

It was a rubber coat—although Max did not know it—which the boy had crawled over in concealing himself, and he had left enough of the traces of his sudden bath on it to make it appear as though it had been thrown in there wet and had partly dried.

"Prince or the youngster probably had that on to-night," continued the giant, "and threw it in there to get it out of the way. The idea of its being possible for any one to follow him here is nonsense."

"All right," assented Tom; "shut that blind down while I kick this locker door shut, and then we'll smoke a couple of his majesty's cigars and have a pow-wow."

"Go it, Tommy."

"Well, in the first place, this is our ranch now, and I think we'd better keep it, don't you?"

"By all means! I'll wager that no one but the Prince knows how to find it, and he won't come back."

"How about the youngster?"

"Blindfolded, same as we were, sure."

"What shall we do with him? let him go?"

"I don't know about that. It might not be policy, if you mean to carry out your plan of going into society. He might recognize you."

"Well, what shall we do with him then?"

"Send him after the Prince."

"No, I don't like that; killing is not in my line."

"Well, it's in mine! I'm not afraid of ghosts. Prince isn't the first one I've done for, as you know."

"Yes, I know, but—"

"Bah! no buts now, Tommy. We can't risk anything at this stage of the game. The forty-five is only a mite beside the thing we're after, and nothing must stand in your way. Leave the youngster to me. I'll fix him so he won't know us, and I won't kill him either, if you like that better."

"What will you do?"

"Leave that to me, I say. If you don't know, it won't worry you. I don't do things by halves."

"Very well; suit yourself. But to return to the real discussion. How long ought we to remain cooped up here?"

"That depends on when you want to blossom out in your new character."

"As soon as advisable."

"Any time is safe enough now—for you. Nobody will connect you in any way with the robbery in Brooklyn, particularly in your new character. As for me—well, I think it will be best for me to lay by a little longer. I don't believe that the police have quite forgotten me yet, and I'm so cursed big that I can't disguise very well."

"Will you make this your headquarters?"

"Sure; it's the safest place I know."

"Very well, then; suppose I dress up and get out to-night?"

"What's your rush?"

"I'm tired of staying here, and besides, I'm getting uneasy."

"What about?"

"About everything."

"Well, fix up, and go when you have a mind to. There's one drawback."

"What's that?"

"We don't know where in blazes we are."

"Somewhere on the Jersey shore."

"How do you know that?"

"By the length of the ferry we crossed."

"What hotel will you go to?"

"The one we talked of before; there is no need of mentioning names."

"Well, fix up, and let me look at you."

The silence which followed the last remark led Max to think that one or both of the men had left the cabin; but that only one had gone, and that one the man Tom, became evident in a moment more, by the big man breaking out into a soliloquy regarding his absent partner in crime.

"Tom is sharp and keen," he muttered, in

his heavy voice, "but he's taking chances that I wouldn't, all the same, even though he says that I am foolish to recklessness. Well, nothing risked, nothing gained, and as he risks everything, and I nothing, and yet gives me half if he succeeds, I can't complain. He has used me right, that is certain."

"I've a great deal of respect for Tom's long head and clear sightedness, but to think that he could sit quietly in his room and work out a scheme as deep as this one is beyond me."

"Poor Mordaunt; I'm sorry some one did him up, for we treated him badly enough in taking his cash. It was necessary, though, and a part of Tom's scheme; in fact, his plans didn't amount to a row of pins without it."

"I wonder who 'did for' the old fellow. Like as not the police will be just stupid enough to lay the whole thing to the burglary, though I should think any one could see that the burglars wouldn't be fools enough to go back the next day and kill the man they had robbed, after they had got all they wanted. Allee samee, John, I'll lie pretty low for a while longer. With the Prince out of the way, I've nobody to fear, but I never felt easy while he knew so much."

"The only one who would stand any chance of spotting either of us is that messenger-boy. A plucky little rooster he was, too. I'll risk his knowing our faces, though he might possibly get onto the voices. But then, he's too young and obscure to amount to anything. The police will make a half-dozen arrests, and send for him to do the identifying, and by-and-by, he'll imagine he has struck the right one, and up will go an innocent man, just as I was sent up the first time, and did three years and-a-half for being honest."

"Talk about prisons preventing crime; they make more crime than they prevent, for I learned all the roguery I know in those years in limbo; and when I came out, I left my conscience and my love for my fellow-man behind me, because a fellow might as well have the game as the name."

"Tom is different; he's cold-blooded. He never did anything out of the beaten path before, but he takes to it as a duck takes to water, and something tells me that he will escape the consequences and that I will have to take them."

"Bah! if I keeps on, I'll get to croaking, presently, and that isn't in my line any more than killing is in Tom's. That's all talk! I believe that he would put me out of the way without regret, if he got a good chance, for he's inclined to be afraid of me."

"Graff has got to go under; he knows too much; but I'll keep him here until I make a break, and then see what is best to be done."

Silence ensued. The big man had ceased speaking, having relapsed into silent thought, and presently Max heard a snore, which told that he had dropped asleep.

"If I could only get a look at his face," thought the boy. "I'll try anyway."

With great care he began removing the things he had piled on top of him, one by one, and then, turning around, he pushed the locker door cautiously open a little way.

Several times the snoring ceased for a moment, and then went on again, proving that the slumberer was sleeping but lightly.

At length Max succeeded in getting the door in such a position that he could thrust out his head and gaze at the sleeping man.

He was half-reclining in a chair, with his head thrown back; and a massive head it was, too, covered with a thick growth of dark hair, fast turning gray. The face was strong and fearless and almost swarthy of complexion. The whole surmounted by broad, powerful shoulders and a massive frame, betokening great endurance and strength.

Max gazed long and earnestly at him.

"I will know you the next time I see you," muttered the boy. "I wish I could say as much for your friend Tom, for from what I already know of him, I imagine him to be the greater villain of the two; but he is too cautious—I won't be able to get a look at him this time."

The boy drew in his head, and once more arranged himself comfortably, and presently the gruff voice of the big man exclaimed:

"Hello, Tom; back again? I've been asleep, I guess. Whew! blest if I would know you myself if I should meet you on the street in that rig. Why, you're a regular downright swell."

"Drop it!" said the other, laconically, "and help me to find my way out of this beastly place. The boat is probably safe enough, and after seeing me ashore, you can return here. Daylight will be on us in about two hours, and

I want to be over in the big town by that time."

"When am I going to see you again, Tom?"

"In about a week; say a week from to-night, I'll come here."

"How? I'll have to meet you somewhere in the boat."

"We will settle that when you have found a good place to leave me. Pick up the bull's-eye and come on. We've got a little exploring to do before we get out of this."

Max felt overjoyed. Here was an opportunity greater than any he had dreamed of. The big fellow would go to take his companion ashore, and thereby be compelled to leave him in sole possession of the "Nest," which would give him ample time to examine things at his leisure, and finally to plan a way of exit as well as a way to get in again when he should want to, without the necessity of taking the long boat-ride. He saw before him no reason why he could not speedily bring the men to justice who had robbed the late Mr. Mordaunt of forty-five thousand dollars.

"One week from to-night," he thought, "they will both be here. That is my time for their capture, and it gives me plenty of opportunity to prepare the little surprise-party for them. I'll be on hand, gentlemen, never fear."

The two men hastily completed their preparations, and left the cabin *en route* for the boat. Max had heard just enough to make him very anxious to know what scheme the fellow Tom was playing, but nothing had been said which would give him any clew, and he was obliged to trust entirely to their engagement to meet a week hence, to capture them.

He waited for some time in his place of concealment before venturing out, but finally, feeling assured that they had had sufficient time in which to reach the boat and embark, he crawled out into the cabin.

He had forgotten entirely the impediment to their progress, which they would meet with in the shape of the displaced plank.

Without hesitation, he began rummaging about the cabin in search of anything he could find of interest, and had just thrown open the door of a cupboard in which were several packages of papers, when he heard the tread of heavy hurrying feet on the deck over his head.

He turned in haste to dive into the locker once more, but was too late, for at that instant the sliding hatch was thrown back, and the lower part of a man's figure appeared on the steps in the act of descending.

The boy detective looked about him hastily for a place of concealment, but in vain.

With a feeling of desperation in his heart, he drew his revolver, raised the hammer and waited for the comer to appear.

He had no doubt but that it was the giant, and he realized that he was in a critical situation.

CHAPTER XVI.

"HOLD UP YER HANDS!"

THE instant that Max realized the danger he was in, he prepared himself for it as coolly as a practiced veteran of the regular detective force might have done.

He knew that flight was out of the question; that he was, in fact, cornered, and must face the music, whatever the consequences, and accordingly, with his revolver in readiness, he waited for the man who was descending the ladder to appear.

It was but an instant, for with one last spring, the giant—for it was he—landed upon the floor of the cabin.

He had scarcely gathered himself, after alighting, when Max spoke.

"Throw up your hands, or you're a dead man!" he said shortly, and in a sharp tone.

Like a tiger the big ruffian wheeled, his hand at the same instant gliding swiftly toward the pocket where he carried his pistol—the same arm which had already taken one life that night.

"Hands up!" ordered Max sternly. "If you attempt to draw, I'll kill you! Hands up, I say!"

Slowly, reluctantly, but nevertheless surely, those great hands which could have crushed the boy so easily, were raised over the big man's head.

"That's right, stranger," commented Max; "I'm glad to see that you've got sense."

"Who are you?" gruffly demanded the big fellow, noticing with surprise that it was a mere boy with whom he had to deal.

That's w'at I wants ter know," answered Max, who—it will be remembered—was still in

his bootblack's costume, "who be you? Ye see, Mister Midget—an' moly Hoses! ain't you a midget, though! I'm a friend o' Prince Charlie's, I am, an' I kin here by appointment to meet him. I can't find him, an' I don't know you, so I wants ter hear yer name an' see yer credentials; instanter, 'r down ye go, see?" and he winked mischievously.

As for the big one—well, when the boy announced himself as a friend of Prince's, he looked greatly relieved, because for a moment he had feared that some stranger had penetrated into the retreat so securely hidden away under the old wharf.

"See here, sonny," he said, "just let me drop my arms, and we'll soon set things to rights. I, too, am a friend to the Prince."

"No ye don't!" ordered Max; "keep 'em up till ye've proved yer status, an' then all's serene; but ef ye can't satisfy me that w'at ye say's true, I'll blow yer brains out, sure's my name's— But say! go on—I ain't heerd yourn yet."

"My name," said the giant, frowning a little at being obliged to keep his arms in their uncomfortable position over his head; "well, if you are one of the Prince's friends, sonny, you will know me when I give it; my name is Pigmy Ben."

In thus answering Max, the big man intended to draw him into a trap, for he gave a name which he knew that Charley Prince had never heard applied to him, and he thought if the boy was an impostor he would pretend to immediately recognize the name.

But Max was not to be so easily caught.

He shook his head solemnly and replied:

"No—I ain't never heard yer name afore, Mister Pigmy; go on!"

"Go on with what?"

"Wid th' credentials."

"What do you wish to know?"

"How ye got here, and so forth."

"I, and a friend, who is now outside waiting for me, came in a boat with the Prince. Our eyes were bandaged, and we don't know where we are. The Prince was to come to-night and pilot us out, but he hasn't shown up, and we've got to go—at least my friend has—and being afraid that something has happened to detain the Prince, we were just trying to find our way out without him. Now, youngster, drop that pistol, because that's all I can tell you."

"That's enough," said Max, lowering the hammer of his weapon and dropping it into his pocket. "Ye kin send up a message fur yer hands ter come down now, an' ef ye want me ter show ye the way out, why, I kin do it, an' don't ye forget it."

"Who are you, boy? I never heard the Prince speak of you."

"Mebby not—he ain't much given ter blabbin'. I answer ter 'most any name. Pete's commonest, an' Lobster's next, 'cos my hair's about the color of a b'iled lobster."

"You say you can pilot us out?"

"I kin."

"Where to?"

"To the ferry, ef ye want ter go there. All over New York, ef that don't suit."

"What ferry?"

"Hoboken."

"Ah! Tom was right. How far is it from here?"

"Jist a piece."

"Well, if you will do it and then bring me back I'll pay you well for it, Lobster."

"Can't, Midget. I'll take ye out, but ye'll never come back alone. I've got an engagement. Ye kin take yer bearin's as we go out so's ye kin git back O. K., an' to-morrer night I'll come ag'in, 'cos I've got ter see the Prince."

"All right, boy, I'll chance it. Wait here for me a minute."

The giant went through the narrow passage toward the other end of the old boat, presently returning with an overcoat.

"Now, youngster," he said, "you stay here till I whistle, and then come out and join us; I've got to tell my friend about you."

"No whistlin'!" said Max, sternly; "it ain't allowed—it's too noisy. Go an' see yer friend, an' then come back after me when ye'r' ready."

The giant nodded and then went hastily up the ladder.

"I've got you now, my beauties," thought the lad, exultingly, when he was alone. "You will both fall into my trap like flies into a sugar-barrel. The only trouble will be in getting away from that big fellow when we land, for if I read him rightly, he'll grab me and bring me back here with him whether I want to come or not, if he gets the chance. I guess, though, I can give them the slip."

It was fully fifteen minutes before Max heard footsteps over his head again, but at last they sounded on the deck, and the boy knew that Tom was coming back with the giant in order to satisfy himself that the strange boy was all right.

"Now I'll have a chance to see him," muttered Max, but he was disappointed, for when they stood before him, the one called Tom was completely enveloped in the great-coat, the collar being pulled up around his ears, while his face was concealed by a huge beard which Max instantly knew to be false.

"Ever cautious," thought the young detective, as Tom began to ply him with questions which he answered readily enough, being prepared for what was coming.

He succeeded in satisfying them both so well that in a few minutes the trio set out to make their way to the boat.

The fallen plank was raised without much trouble, a rope being found near at hand by means of which it could be hauled up into place, as Max had surmised.

In a very short time they were out upon the river, where it did not take the brave lad more than a moment to get his bearings, for he was perfectly familiar with the myriad of lights which glisten over the dark water during the night.

It was almost morning, but darkness would last long enough for the boat to return to its hidden moorings before dawn, if they made haste.

That they did, and presently, more by accident than design, Max had guided them to the very pier from which they had embarked earlier in the night, hidden in the locker of the boat.

"Here we are!" he said, "an' now ye'd better let me show ye the way to the ferry, Mister Tom."

"No, I don't need you," replied Tom. "You stay here in the boat until I'm out of sight."

"All right—ef ye don't need me; jest es you say, boss. Hold on till I ketch hold of this pile an' stiddy the boat."

He did not catch hold of the pile, but with one quick leap he sprung from the boat to the dock.

"I'm late, so I'll skip along, seein' ye don't need me," he said, lightly. "So-long, gents. I'll see you to-morrow night, Midget, if you'll meet me here at one o'clock," and before either of them could answer, he had darted away and was lost in the darkness.

CHAPTER XVII.

"THAT IS THE MAN!"

MAX had formed a perfectly correct idea in regard to the intention of the big man, for Pigmy Ben—as he had dubbed himself—had intended to seize and hold the boy and take him back to the sunken boat beneath the old wharf and keep him there until such time as his own plans would permit him to go at liberty again.

The quick and unexpected move made by the boy detective, had, however, frustrated this plan, and with a curse or two at his friend's carelessness, Tom asked him what he proposed to do, now that the boy had escaped.

They were still sitting in the boat, as it was there that they intended to part, and neither of them suspected that the boy who had but just escaped them would return to hear what they were saying.

Such, however, was the fact, for Max, after running away some distance turned and crept back on his hands and knees, toward the spot where he had left the boat, feeling that it was very necessary for him to hear what they might say on parting.

It was fortunate that he did so, for, had he relied upon the plans already laid—that of the two men meeting there again a week from that night—he would have lost all that he had braved so much to win. As it was, he crept up close enough to overhear their conversation, just in time to catch the big fellow's reply to Tom's question.

"Oh, the kid is right enough," said the giant; "he is one of the Prince's spies, I suppose. There's no danger of his dropping anything, or Charley would never have trusted him with the secret of the nest over there. Let our plans go on just as we have made them."

"It is dangerous," muttered Tom.

"Even so," returned Big Ben, "I've got no place to keep shady in except this—"

"Well—cut it short. You have got to be getting back, or daylight'll catch you. Instead of waiting a week before I meet you here, I'll come back to-morrow night, and in the mean time we can both think it over."

"All right! What time?"

"Two."

"Good—I'll be here with the boat. Light out, now!"

With a bound, Tom alighted on the wharf, barely giving Max time to spring behind a pile of planking near at hand.

But Tom evidently felt secure, for he did not take the trouble to so much as look around him, as he hastened toward the dark street at the end of the pier.

"I'll just follow you long enough to see where you put up, my covey," muttered the boy, as he stole along behind him, "and then I think I'll have my hands full if I get the little surprise party that I have planned ready in time."

We will not go into the details of this shadowing process, during which Max never once lost sight of the man he was following. Suffice it to say that he finally ran him to earth in one of the most fashionable New York hotels.

The young detective waited outside until he was sure that Tom had been conducted to his room, and then he ran into the hotel office apparently in very great haste.

Rushing up to the office desk and standing before the registry-book, which was still open, he breathlessly asked the clerk on duty if a Mr. Morrison had arrived therefrom the Grand Central Depot during the night.

"No," said the clerk, shortly. "Then he'll come this morning," returned Max. "Tell him that Mr. Wright wants to see him as early as possible at his office," and without waiting for a reply, he turned and darted away again, this time making straight for Brooklyn.

He had seen all he wished to; that is, the last entry on the registry-book of the hotel, and the name he read was:

"MORTIMER DEAN STANLEY."

The night was dark and threatening, a storm having been brewing all day, and it was just beginning to manifest itself in little spiteful gusts of rain-filled wind when ten men, headed by a youth in the garb of a messenger-boy, made their way slowly toward the end of a Brooklyn wharf.

There a tugboat having two rowboats in tow, was waiting for them, and they lost no time in boarding her, and were soon steaming toward the Battery.

It was just one o'clock when they arrived at a point in the North River near an old pier jutting far out into the water.

"That is the one," said the youth, who was in the tug's bow with two of the men. "Now use your night-glasses for all they are worth, and by-and-by you will see a boat with one occupant row away from the pier toward the north. When you do, give me the glass for an instant, and if the right man is in the boat, I'll know it by his size; after that we'll have to act quickly."

Then silence reigned, and minutes ticked slowly away.

It lacked but twenty minutes to two when the officer with the glasses turned to Max, and said:

"There is the boat."

Seizing the glass, the youth applied it to his eye. A moment's gaze satisfied him.

"It's all right," he said; "that is the man, and we must lose no time."

The boats which were towing astern of the tug were hastily hauled forward, and silently the ten men and the youth embarked in them.

A few moments' pull took them to the pier, where Max had no difficulty in finding the spot where he had made his exit the night before.

As soon as the plank walk which Prince had constructed was reached, eight of the men followed our hero over its narrow surface, while the other two rowed the boats back to the tug, which still patiently waited out in the river.

Guided by Max, the sturdy officers soon reached the old canal-boat and passed into the cabin.

From there, two of them, accompanied by Max, went through the narrow passage to the other end of the boat, where they found Kilian Graff, tightly bound, but still alive.

He was released and taken back to the main cabin, where he was told to crawl into the locker so lately occupied by Max, and wait until he was told to come out.

Then the eight men, shutting their lantern slides, arranged themselves around the little cabin, and waited.

At last, and when the suspense was becoming almost unbearable, footsteps sounded on the deck overhead.

In a moment more the sliding-hatch was

thrown back, and they could hear some one descending the ladder.

"All right, Tom," said a gruff voice. "Come on. Throw the light on the ladder so that you can see your way."

Then a slender streak of bright light fell upon the ladder from the opening, disappearing almost instantly, and followed by the sound of another person descending.

"There!" said the gruff voice, "now give me the bull's-eye, while I find a better light with it."

There was an instant of total silence, which was suddenly broken by a sharp click, and then, as if impelled by a single spring, eight lantern-slides flew back, and eight streams of brilliant light fell full upon the two figures which had but just descended the ladder.

"Hands up!" came the stern order at the same instant. "The first one who moves is a dead man!"

Completely taken by surprise, the two men for a moment remained motionless, staring and speechless.

Big Ben was the first to recover, and then realizing that they were caged, he made one wild dash for liberty.

It was a novel attempt, and nearly succeeded.

He seized his friend Tom, and hurled him with all his strength—and it was gigantic—toward the officers, and at the same instant made a wild leap for the ladder.

But there was a flash and a ringing report, and he fell back on the cabin floor moaning and helpless.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE lamps in the cabin were lighted. Tom was lying in one corner, tightly bound, while Kilian Graff was stretched upon one of the bunks, also bound.

Upon a mattress in the center of the floor rested the form of Big Ben. He was breathing heavily and still conscious, although it was plainly to be seen that he was dying.

At his side were Max and two of the officers, one of whom was engaged in rapidly writing down the last words of the dying man.

"My name is Walter Percy," he said, gaspingly, and sometimes with long pauses between his words, "and my companion is Thomas Beckwith. This boy, who has tracked us down, is the same one we sent as a messenger to Mr. Mordaunt the night we robbed him. I am sorry that the old man was murdered, and don't know who did it."

"Can you answer a few questions?" asked Max.

"Yes."

"Who is Mortimer Dean Stanley?"

"A young Englishman, and cousin to Mordaunt. He was very wealthy. Tom used to be a servant to Mordaunt, and, while there, stole a lot of Stanley's letters to the old man. The Englishman came here for a visit, two years ago, and was lost while yachting—drowned. Tom had gone out with him, as half-valet, half-companion. The yacht was capsized and Tom managed to swim ashore. Stanley was drowned. Tom resolved to play a deep game."

"He wrote to England, imitating Stanley's handwriting, and also to Mordaunt, saying that he had escaped, but that the servant, Tom, was lost. Then he waited, and finally took me into his confidence. He resembled Stanley sufficiently to pass himself off for him, dressed in his clothes, but needed money. His plan was to go to the bank where Stanley did business, make a large deposit in his name, say that he had been sick with rheumatism, to account for his slight difference in appearance or in the signature, and thus finally become possessed of all of Stanley's immense fortune. I guess the plan would have worked, but for the messenger-boy."

"You do not know who killed Mr. Mordaunt, then?"

"No. I do not."

"Could it have been Tom?"

"No, for he was here with me. I—can't—talk, any more—I—am—dy—ing."

Gradually his limbs stiffened, and in a moment more the once powerful man was a motionless corpse upon the cabin floor.

Then the officers took their prisoners, and, after gathering up whatever they could find of interest in the Nest, they signaled to the tug, and were taken to Brooklyn.

But a few words more, and the story is told.

For a long time the mystery surrounding Mr. Mordaunt's death remained unrevealed, but at last it was solved.

It will be remembered that the father of

Kilian Graff was a lunatic, confined in an asylum.

It transpired that he had effected his escape, and, as those who have lost their reasoning faculties are the most dangerous toward their best friends, he had turned his steps toward the house of his brother-in-law, and had killed him. It was not until the maniac was found nearly frozen in the street, and taken to a station-house, that his escape was known, and the story of his crime brought to light.

Kilian Graff, against whom no charge was made, disappeared very shortly after he was rescued from the sunken canal-boat, and no one knew where he had gone.

As for our young friend, Maxwell Merry, he remained in Brooklyn.

Notwithstanding the fact that Mr. Mordaunt's will had made him independent, he persevered in following the advice given him by the kind old man—that of keeping a nest-egg, and laying something beside it every day, while that something was constantly employed in relieving want and doing good among the thousands of boys who have to scrape for themselves through the temptations of a great city, and he was never so happy as when some such endeavor bore the wished-for fruit.

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